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SERMONS ON PRAYER.

PRAYER.

WITH
THE PUBLISH
COMPLIM

FIVE SERMONS PREACHED IN THE CHAPEL

OF

TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN.

BY

JAMES THOMAS O'BRIEN, D.D.,

Late Bishop of Ossory Ferns and Leighlin.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Sermons now printed were preached many years ago in the Chapel of Trinity College, Dublin, the first of the series bearing date December 14th, 1836.

The putting forward of certain difficulties connected with Prayer, within the last few years, by some of the leading periodicals, led the late Bishop of Ossory to think that their publication might possibly be of use to minds unsettled and disturbed by the objections thus raised.

The pressure, however, of questions connected with what has been going forward in the Irish Church since its disestablishment, so occupied

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his time and thoughts that he was unable to bestow either on anything else.

During his last illness he expressed his regret that he had been thus unable to deal more fully with the subject of prayer and its difficulties, and wished, if the manuscript sermons could be made available for publication, that they might be printed.

The recapitulation necessary in the case of sermons which compose a series, but which are not preached, on consecutive Sundays, is obviously unsuited to printed discourses which will be read together. But the recasting of the form would have involved so much alteration that it has been thought better to leave them as they were found.

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SERMONS ON PRAYER.

I.

But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath Day.—MATT. xxiv. 20.

THE Bible bears multiplied marks of the high source from which it springs. I do not mean the materials which it furnishes for a direct proof that it comes from God, but the confirmations of this proof which are supplied by the various indications of a Divine origin which are to be found in it—and of these there are I think few which are felt to be more impressive than the absence which it exhibits everywhere of all care to avoid wounding man's pride, shocking his prejudices, and even startling his reason: and, which is part of the same character, the absence also,—when such matters of offence do occur,—of everything in the way of qualification or justification of them.

It professes to come from God, and the representations of the Divine character which it records, generally and upon the whole, so far transcend

everything that human wisdom in its highest state of cultivation has left us on the same subject, as of themselves to furnish a very impressive evidence of the divinity of its source. Here and there however some things occur, which seem not only at war with the views that we have previously formed of the Divine nature, but at war with its own representations of Him. But whatever be the difficulties thus provided for us, there is no attempt made to remove or to soften or to account for them.

It professes to come from Him who made man, and who knows what is in him. And the acquaintance which it exhibits with the darkest recesses of our corrupt hearts and all their most intricate windings, is exact enough to vindicate its claim. Here too, however, we meet occasionally with something which does not, at first sight at least, accord easily with our preconceptions, but which as before we are left to reconcile with them as we may.

The same remarks apply to all that it tells us of man's original state, of his past history, of his future prospects. There is the same general accordance with the best notions that we have been able to form upon all these important subjects; the same occasional collision with these notions; and the same steady abstinence from all attempts to prevent or to soften the shock: when we look for something to explain or to reconcile, there is the same silence.

Of the difficulties thus raised, some disappear upon a second glance at the passage which has

suggested them. More serious ones often give way to patient and humble investigation; while there are some which remain notwithstanding all our exertions. But whether they be superficial or deep, the Bible manifests the same indifference to avoid or to remove them. And this forbearance, which seems to spring so naturally from a consciousness that the source from which it comes renders it man's plain duty to labour patiently to remove all the difficulties which he finds in them, and to acquiesce humbly in all that resist his efforts, cannot but be felt to harmonize impressively with the true account of its origin. It would be very hard—I do not think indeed that it would be possible—to render a reasonable account of this striking phenomenon, if we believed that the various books of which the Bible is composed were altogether the work of different men, writing at different stages of the history of the world, and themselves differing so widely in circumstances and training, in mind and in character, as it is plain the authors of the Holy Scriptures did. But the difficulty disappears when we hold, as we do, that though these men were really, they were not exclusively the authors of the books which bear their names, for that they wrote under the direction and control of God's Holy Spirit. This accounts easily and perfectly for the remarkable phenomenon which we have noticed. And the fact that it does so ought, I think, to be received as a strong confirmation of the view of the nature and origin of

the Holy Scriptures, which recognizes in them a Divine as well as a human element, resulting from the union of a Divine and human Author in every part of them. But we do, I think, know enough of the nature of man to feel tolerably certain that it has some higher source than his wisdom.

Of these instances a remarkable one seems furnished by my text. It is neither preceded nor followed by anything in the way of explanation or justification. And yet it seems to offer or to suggest a difficulty which cannot be regarded as a light one.

The Lord, who was sitting on the Mount of Olives, is answering the inquiries of His disciples concerning the judgments which were to fall on the devoted city that lay before them at the moment. His reply, though cast in a prophetic form, and abounding in images proper to the prophetic style, is really, as you know, almost a historical narrative of the horrors of the impending visitation which He foretells. My purpose however will not allow me to look beyond the remarkable passage which I have selected from this awful prediction. He has suspended for a moment the details, into which He had entered,—and how must the pause have deepened in His hearers a sense of the truth and reality of all that He was predicting—He suspends the detail to supply to His disciples a sign by which they might know when the danger was drawing nigh, and to give them counsel how they were to escape from it. And of the counsel which He

gives them for the course by which their sufferings might be mitigated, or their escape rendered more secure, my text forms a part. It is, as you have just heard, that they should pray to God that this outpouring of His wrath on His rebellious people might not be in the season which would throw natural difficulties in the way of their flight; and that He might not choose for it that day, which from their religious engagements upon it, or their scruples against violating its sanctity, might no less fatally impede their escape. That is, He advises them to address prayer to God having for its object to fix or to unfix the time of a visitation, the season and day and hour of which we must believe fixed in the Divine counsels before Jerusalem was built or the foundations of the earth were laid!

This suggests what is likely to be thought a serious difficulty. And if it reached no further than this particular case, if it had no other effect than thus creating a doubt of the reasonableness of the Lord's advice to His disciples on this particular occasion, it would seem not undeserving of some pains to remove it or to lessen it, or at least to ascertain its exact amount. But such a consideration of it is really a matter of wider interest to us. For though the difficulty is likely to be generally introduced into the mind by some striking case like the one before us, it can hardly be there long without being felt to reach much further. It must be soon seen indeed that the

difficulty is not confined to cases which impress the imagination thus strongly: but that whatever be its amount it attaches equally to all prayer, whatever be its objects. That to suppose any event caused or prevented or modified by man's supplications involves precisely the same difficulty whether the event be important or unimportant.

And in saying this, I do not mean to rely upon what is yet sufficiently obvious: that we are very little qualified to determine the true character of an event in this respect after it has happened; and not at all before. A very little reflection upon the intricate connections of events, their remote consequences even in this life, and their unending consequences in another; and a little reflection too upon our limited power of perceiving their actual connections and of tracing the consequences which they have already produced, and our utter blindness as to the consequences to which they are to give birth, would teach us to place little reliance upon our power of distinguishing events in this way, and make us forbear from applying to them very confidently the terms, important and unimportant: because it would show us most clearly, that when we bestow such names upon the best grounds we can command, a larger view of relations and results might materially alter or indeed actually reverse the characters which we had assigned to them.

I do not mean to apply this fair and obvious reflection—which yet for other reasons it behoves

us to bear in mind—to show that such difficulties as we have been speaking of cannot be confined to one class of events. I mean this: that if we could with certainty determine of two events, that one was of little moment in man's history, and that the other was of wide interest and of real importance, the difficulties connected with prayer, having for its object to avert or procure the latter would, in every degree in which they deserve serious attention, equally affect prayer designed to secure or prevent the other.

This is unquestionably the case; and very little consideration can hardly fail to show that it is. For the only difficulty connected with the subject which is likely much to affect a reasoning mind arises from regarding prayer as an attempt to settle or to unsettle what is irrevocably fixed, as being the result of causes operating according to immutable laws. But surely this difficulty is not confined to important events. No one who forms any rational conception of such a system of causation as is here referred to, can imagine that in it important events are produced certainly, and unimportant events contingently. And still less—if possible still less—is any reasonable being likely to suppose that the latter are objects of less certain foresight to the Omniscient God than the former.

We should not therefore disguise from ourselves the real extent of the difficulty. It affects alike every act of supplication to the Most High, and in effect brings into question whether Prayer be really

a reasonable service. And the consideration of such a difficulty, how far it is removable, and how far it ought to regulate our conduct and feelings in this our most important duty and privilege,—this, I persuade myself, you cannot regard as a matter of light interest, but that you will be disposed to bestow on it all the attention that it deserves and requires.

In the first place, then, I think that it requires but a moment's consideration to see that no sound objection lies against the efficiency of prayer derived from the foreknowledge of God. Those who raise the difficulty, when they speak most reasonably, admit that foreknowledge exercises no influence upon the event in the way of cause; but, they maintain, if it really exists, it is itself so derived from the certainty of the event foreseen, that it could not exist if that event were contingent.

This seems almost a truism, it is said; for if it were possible that a particular combination of events might not happen, how could it be certainly foreknown? If an event be certainly foreknown, the occurrence and mode of it are certainly fixed, for otherwise they could not be certainly foreknown.

If therefore, it is said, we will not deny to God the absolute knowledge of all things future which not only seems to our best apprehensions to be as essential a part of His perfections as any other that human reason assigns to Him, and which certainly is as distinctly asserted of Him and claimed

for Him in His own Word as any other, but is clearly proved there to be possessed by Him by the prophecies which it contains—if we will not deny God's foreknowledge, we must see that it is useless to attempt in any way to alter by prayer the course of events. From habit, or prejudice, or the almost instinctive effects of strong anxiety, we may address supplications still to God when we are strongly interested about an event which to our views appears of doubtful issue. But Reason, if she were heard, would show how vain is all such importunity, by reminding us that this event was foreknown by the Most High before He called the world into being, and must have been then as fixed as any past event can be now; so that a prayer to alter it must be as fruitless as a prayer to alter the past. But this applies in the same way to everything future. And it is plain, therefore, that a prayer which is intended to exert an influence over the future in any way, is equally unreasonable—that a prayer to determine it now must be unavailing, if our desires oppose His foreknowledge, and superfluous if they coincide with it.

But assuredly if Reason tells us this, she is misled, and is misleading us by a partial view of the case, even in this mode of looking at it. For if the event be a matter of foresight, so is the prayer. No event is foreseen, as the objection seems to assume, apart from all that precedes it and influences its production. In God's foresight it

stands as it does *in rerum naturâ*, not an isolated occurrence, but connected with other things and as the result of them. So that whatever connection our prayers might have had with the issue had there been no foreknowledge of it, the very same may they have upon the supposition that it is certainly foreknown.

Foreknowledge, so far as it is simply foreknowledge, not only does not itself alter the course of events or disturb their relations, but it leaves the true system of cause and effect wholly undisturbed. So that if prayer could influence an event on the supposition that foreknowledge did not exist, the knowledge neither alters the connection of the act and the event, nor requires that it should be altered. Foreknowledge leaves prayer just as useful and as necessary as before, and therefore leaves all the motives under which we lie to employ it unimpaired, for the purposes of this argument.

The common sense of mankind has decided this point in numberless cases which in all important respects are precisely the same. Were we to say to a man ploughing or sowing: You are doing all this under the notion that if you do it you will have a crop in this field, and that if you leave it undone there will be none. Now I do not profess to be able to tell you whether there will be a crop or not, but I can venture to assure you that you are very idly employed—that you are throwing away time and labour and money. For whether there will or not, was known to God before the

field or the world was made: the event was certain to Him, and was therefore itself fixed before all time. And to act now as if the issue, whatever it is to be, could be made different by what you do or forbear to do, is as wild as if you attempted to alter the past.

We might talk in this way, but we all know how little reasoning of this kind would disturb a plain man of the world in the course of his worldly occupations. And yet we see that it is no less applicable to all of them than it is to prayer. Nor is the practical principle by which we regulate our feelings and our conduct in such cases less applicable to prayer than it is to them. It is this: We employ all fitting means to bring about events which yet we believe to be fixed in God's foreknowledge, however doubtful they are to us. And we do so without ever conceiving that the use of means is dispensed with by the event being foreknown; and without feeling that this in any way lessens the force of the motives under which we lie to employ the proper means diligently. So far as our conduct and our feelings are concerned it is the same whether there be a Being to whom all results doubtful to us are certainly known, or whether they be as uncertain to the minds of all beings as they are to ours.

We may therefore put out of view the foreknowledge of God in this case, of prayer also. It plainly leaves the matter where it was, leaves the efficacy of prayer and the grounds and motives for

the employment of prayer just what they would be, if the event which we desire to procure or to avert were as unknown to every being in the universe as it is to ourselves.

But it will probably be said that this is just the point to which it was desirable to bring the question of the reasonableness of prayer. That the foreknowledge of God is not intended to be relied upon as a cause but as an effect, and only so far as it serves to prove that the laws by which the world is governed are immutable. And that if this immutability be in any way established, it seems enough to decide the question. That it is acknowledged that however difficult it may be in speculation to reconcile the certainty of events in the divine foreknowledge with our employment of means to bring them about, the difficulty disappears in other cases in practice, and ought therefore to be disregarded in the case of prayer too, if the cases were analogous; but that the correspondence fails in the very points in which it is most important that it should obtain. For that when we attempt to bring about an end that we desire by the employment of means which experience has shown to be fitted to bring it about in conformity with nature's laws, we suppose the immutability of these laws, we take our place in the system of causation which is regulated and governed by them; but when we employ prayer to bring it about, we virtually assume that these laws are mutable, we assume a system of causation entirely

different from the one which experience shows actually to exist.

The belief in the permanence of the natural laws with which experience has made us acquainted is confessed upon all hands to be a first principle. It lies at the bottom of all our reasonings about natural phenomena, and is the foundation of all the practical and all the moral uses which we make of them. So that while the employment of such means as these laws show to be efficacious in bringing about the end which we desire is plainly to conform to the clearest dictates of reason, to use prayer with the hope of bringing it about is as plainly to cast off the authority of reason altogether.

I do not know what force may appear in such reasoning at first view, but I am sure that it requires very little consideration to see that the unreasonableness of prayer is only made out in this way by a series of unsustained and unsustainable assumptions. Even the very first (though of little importance to the main question) is not only not evidently true, as it is assumed to be, but it is most evidently false. For the foreknowledge of God is so far from proving the immutability of Nature's laws,—under the ordinary notion of "Nature's laws"—that it really would not prove their existence, but is as reconcilable to the supposition that every event is the result of an independent act of the Divine Will, as to the supposition that all form a series of causes and

effects connected by unchangeable laws. Or, supposing the existence and general permanence of such laws, the foreknowledge of a particular event might be the result of a predetermined, preordained interference with them as well as of a maintenance of them. So that if we had no other proof of the absolute immutability of what we call the laws of Nature than the certainty of the divine foreknowledge, it would rest upon a very insecure basis indeed.

Waiving this, however, and supposing that the world is governed by immutable general laws, I do not think that under any reasonable view that can be taken of their nature, they offer any obstacles to the efficacy of Prayer. A loose apprehension of them may suggest that prayer can only be efficacious in any case by suspending or violating these laws. A little closer consideration of their true nature, however, will show how very wide a range is left to the efficacy of Prayer, consistently with the strictest permanency of them.

In the first place, then, as to the spiritual influences, good and evil, which form the highest and most important subjects of our supplications and deprecations, that such influences should be procured, averted, or modified by prayer, is clearly consistent with the existence of general laws, regulating the mutual operation of inanimate objects, but also with general laws regulating the operation of our own minds and of all human souls; of the infinite spirit and of all the finite

spirits by whom any forces are exerted over us. Nor could the utmost success of prayer in this way be regarded as inconsistent with any laws with which we are actually acquainted, or any which we can reasonably conceive as regulating our own mental operations, or those of any other beings concerned.

I do not suppose that anyone will pretend to an acquaintance with any general laws, which on such a supposition would be violated, or indeed with any which render the supposition of the efficacy of prayer in this way at all improbable. Do we know anything of our own minds which makes it in any degree improbable that they are under the direct though secret influence of other spirits? Do we know anything of other spirits that makes it improbable that they should exercise such agency? Our fellow-men can produce various effects upon our minds: we are instructed by them, warned, alarmed, and tranquillized, vexed, and appeased. We are filled with hope and fear, with joy and sorrow, impelled to evil, and to good by them. Our fellow-men can produce all these effects upon us, but for this it is necessary that they should introduce ideas into our minds through our bodily senses. They can only address our minds through this channel. But the limitation evidently arises not from the nature of our minds or theirs, but from the circumstances in which both are placed. There is nothing in the nature or in the laws of our own minds, so far as we know them, to forbid

any, or all, of these impressions from being produced by the immediate action of another mind upon our own. That such action is possible we cannot doubt.

We actually know spirit indeed, only in union with matter, as it exists in our own and other like mixed natures. But we could hardly doubt, I think, that it is as capable of existing apart from matter, as matter is of existing apart from mind. Even if reason left this doubtful, Holy Scripture would make it certain. For it distinctly reveals to us the existence of two great organized spiritual communities in the unseen world. But if spirits can exist separately, they must have some mode of communicating with each other without the intermediate instrumentality which they are obliged to employ when they are united to body. What the mode actually is we do not, and probably in our present state could not, know. But that some mode of intercommunication exists we cannot doubt. And the effects of such intercommunication must be the same, whether it be made directly and immediately, or through the intervention of bodily organs. It must in both cases convey ideas and thoughts from one mind into another, and so, on by direct action, produce emotions there. Now if such direct communication might take place between two disembodied spirits, it would seem that there ought to be no obstacle to its continuance if one of them were united to a body. No obstacle, I mean, in the nature of things to its continuance.

It may be necessary to regulate it, or to prevent it altogether, but, apart from a direct provision for this purpose, there seems to be no reason why the free spirit should not be able to hold communion with the imprisoned one, just as before. The one which is united to a body may be subject, by the nature and conditions of the union, to various restrictions. And in particular, without any change in its powers it may, while the union subsists, be able to exert them only through the organs of the body within which it is *cribbed, cabined, and confined.* The fleshly barrier no doubt limits in various ways the one which it surrounds. Without altering its nature, or its powers and capacities, it subjects them in various ways to new laws. But there does not appear to be anything in the nature of the case which should impose new laws on the operations of the unfettered spirit. I do not of course mean to assert that it does not. It is sufficient to say, what it does seem safe to say, namely: that it does not follow from anything that we know, or that we have any good reason to believe that it does.

I do not think that any candid man who reflects on the course of his own thoughts and the varying state of his own feelings, will be inclined to say that he knows so much of the mode in which ideas enter his mind, and the laws by which they succeed each other there, and by which emotions good and evil are produced there, as to be able to assert that none of these thoughts are caused or modified by

the agency of some spirit holding direct though secret communion with his mind. When therefore revelation tells us of such an agency, whether of the Holy Spirit or of intermediate Spirits, whether good or evil, it tells us nothing which is disproved or discountenanced by anything that we know, or upon any good grounds believe, of our own minds, or of the Spiritual world with which they are connected. Nor, when it tells us that prayer is the way in which good influences are to be procured and evil ones averted, does it tell us what any part of our certain knowledge or of our rational belief renders in any respect improbable.

So that when we implore the enlightening, restraining, guiding, sanctifying, consoling influences of the Holy Spirit, or ask for these influences in larger measure,—when we pray for strength against the temptations of the Evil Spirit,—wisdom against his wiles, courage against his assaults,—we are not supposing the existence of any spiritual forces or mental operations which it can be shown are unlikely to exist. Nor are we presuming that there are no general laws by which the operations of our own minds and of all other spiritual things are regulated, or that such laws are changeable. However certainly they exist, and however permanent they be, the effects produced according to them must be different, according as the subjects of the operations are different. Spiritual forces, like all others, must be regulated in their operation by the nature and circumstances of the objects on which

they have to act. If, when these are changed, the effects remain the same, it would be a proof that the laws by which the forces were regulated were changeable. And no wider difference can exist between two moral agents than if one be careless and disbelieving, the other humble and confiding; the one feeling his danger and his weakness, and in child-like humility and confidence coming to God for aid; the other secure—either not apprehending danger, or in proud reliance upon his own power of averting it. No system of general laws of mind could disregard such a difference, or leave the event the same notwithstanding it; and no wise and just system could fail to make the difference just as the Bible represents it to be.

This comprehends the most important of all the cases which we have to settle; the one in which the duty of prayer is clearest and the benefits sought for infinitely the greatest. But we may go a good deal further, and it is necessary that we should. We are allowed to supplicate that temporal good may be bestowed upon us, and temporal evil taken away, provided we offer such prayers in real submission to God's better judgment for us; and we are encouraged to hope that such prayers will be heard and answered, if not in our way, yet in some other way which the All Wise sees to be better. We ought to be able to vindicate the permission on the same principles, and I think we can do so; for a great part of such good and evil is brought about, not by the instrumentality of inanimate or irrational

existences, but of other intelligent and moral agents like ourselves, agents subject, of course, to all the spiritual influences of which I have been speaking. Now this evidently allows, and provides for, such effects as we are led in the Bible to expect from prayer. Because it is, as we have seen, a natural mode of procuring such spiritual influences as are fitted to excite and direct such thoughts and feelings in the minds of others as lead to good or evil to us; all of which may be exercised without any interference with the general laws which govern minds, but in strict conformity with them. This comprehends an important portion within the range of supplication and deprecation of the good and evil that befall us in this life. It includes love, and friendship, and goodwill, and all the kindly offices to which they give rise: and all malevolent dispositions towards us, and all their effects. It includes, on the one hand, instruction, exhortation, warning, persuasion; on the other, all the evil influences which man exerts upon man. And this of itself would upon these principles leave the range of the operation of prayer a wide one over all that exerts the most powerful influence upon our happiness in this life.

But even with respect to the good and evil that we derive from physical forces operating according to certain laws—it is known how many of these operations were set on foot and brought about by ourselves and by rational agents. And it is evident too, that when they are brought about by

such a concurrence of moral and physical forces, the effect upon us may be altered without any suspension or modification of the laws according to which the irrational or inanimate forces operate, merely by the rational agents being led to perform their part in the operation sooner or later, in this manner or in that. And even in cases where human agency has no share in setting the force in action, and no active concurrence in the production of the effect, it is evident that the effect upon us may be indefinitely altered by our relation to the cause, which is something which we do or refrain from doing, some act or omission dependent upon our own will; and if it be not, it is the result of some act or omission of ours which is dependent more or less upon the will of others; and which in either case is liable therefore to be affected by all the moral causes which influence our wills, and the wills of other voluntary agents with whom we are connected—all such influences and all their results, direct and indirect, immediate and remote, we have seen to be legitimate objects of prayer. Thus, suppose, that according to the laws of matter in the established order of cause and effects, a thunder-storm, a flood, an earthquake, or the eruption of a volcano, were to happen at a certain time and in a certain place, and to produce, in the way of natural consequence, destruction of life or property within a certain range—to cause damage in certain degrees within certain further limits; while beyond, the evil effects

should wholly disappear; whether we should be found within the first or the second circuit, or entirely beyond both, would evidently depend upon our own will, immediately or remotely, and therefore must depend upon, or be influenced by, those spiritual forces of which I before spoke, and so the final effect be modified without any interference with the freedom of our wills or with the permanence and regularity of Nature's laws.

It is evident again what a wide range of events which must concern us in this life this brings under the influence of prayer. Our own lives, and health, and property—the lives, health, and property of all who are dear to us. And this not merely as affected by such occasional phenomena as I have glanced at, but by a number of more permanent causes—as good and bad seasons, healthy and pestilent situations, prosperous and disastrous undertakings, and a large class of the same kind, influencing most extensively human happiness in the very points usually felt to be most interesting to it.

What has been said is, I think, quite enough to show that objections of the class which we have been considering—objections derived from the foreknowledge of God, or from the government of the world by general laws,—are really of no force as applied to prayer to the utmost extent we can have any need or can reasonably desire to employ it: that, in fact, there is little if anything for this present life, and absolutely nothing for the life to

come, that can justly be an object of our solicitude, an object of hope or fear, which may not also be an object of our prayers, all such objections notwithstanding. And this, as I have said, would seem to be enough. And so for the most important practical purpose it would be; but there are difficulties connected with other parts of the whole subject of Prayer, as it is presented to us in the Bible, which are founded upon the same principles as those that have been considered, and are to be answered on the same principle, but which cannot be regarded as sufficiently answered by anything that has been hitherto said.

To complete my design it will be necessary to look at these difficulties, and I should hope that we shall find, that though what has been said has not dealt with them directly, it has opened the way to a satisfactory solution of them. But the consideration of both the difficulties and their solution must of course be reserved for another season. I believe, indeed, there is nothing ordinarily hoped for from prayer, nothing ordinarily asked for, which may not be shown by the application of these principles to be reasonably expected as a result, remote or immediate, of it.

But it is not merely the ordinary effects of prayer which may be shown to be compatible with the government of the world by general laws. A little further consideration will serve to extend the same principles to some recorded effects of Prayer, which are not included in these considera-

tions—in which physical effects are brought about without any physical cause, or without any adequate one—in which the petition was granted, not according to the laws of nature which observation has determined, but in contravention of them.

I believe, I say, that even these cases, so far as they are matter of record, or of promise in Holy Scripture, might be shown to be compatible with such a constitution of the universe as we have been all along supposing—if only we will remember that the supposition that the world is governed by general laws by no means infers that we have discovered the most general laws of its government; and, that we have not—by no means renders useless those which we have discovered, nor proves them to be false. If we have collected them from the phenomena which are at our command as cautiously and as patiently as we ought, we may be sure that if there be a more general law it must be such that, under all circumstances in which we have any means of applying it, it would coincide with those which we have discovered. But suppose that we had discovered the most general law by which the mutual actions of bodies are regulated. It is not to be doubted that there are laws of the same kind, regulating the mutual operations of spiritual beings, which we should discover if the unseen world were disclosed to us. Did we know them, however, a law would still be needed under which their reciprocal and united

actions should be carried on. In our own persons we see a system composed of both natures, acting and reacting upon each other under some law which must be different from the laws of matter and of mind which we have discovered. To account for all such cases of prayer as we are considering, it is only necessary to suppose that in the universe, which is composed of material and immaterial existences, there obtains what we experience in ourselves. For however diverse these two natures be, the experience of ourselves shows that there is no impossibility that matter and its forces may be moved at the will of mind. The effect of the law which regulates the union of our bodies and our minds is to make matter and its forces subject to mind. This takes away all incredibility from such statements as presume such a subjection in the world at large; for this is in effect all that is involved in such cases as we have referred to—that physical changes originate in moral causes, and no other but moral causes would be necessary for bringing about such physical changes as resulted from this subjection. It is plain, however, that a law would be needed to regulate the occasions on which such exertions of spiritual power should take place—a law which must have respect to some properties of matter which our experience of the mutual actions of bodies would not make known to us. The most reasonable supposition would be, that there was some more comprehensive law which embraces the laws of body which we have dis-

covered, and the laws of spiritual substances which we should discover if we had the same opportunities of experiment and observation in the unseen as we have in the visible world. That this more comprehensive law is one in continual operation, and is in fact the true law of the government of the world, though under it there would be a general conformity with what each particular had led us to expect.

We have investigated certain general laws—by which material forces are regulated, and, let us suppose—have perfectly ascertained them. It is not to be doubted, however perplexing the inquiry be, that there are laws which govern the immaterial world too. If we knew them, we should see mind and matter each acting separately according to the laws to which each is subject, but their reciprocal or united action cannot be according to these laws —there is not likely to be any law regulating the mutual actions of spiritual substances which would provide for and regulate the motion of matter by mind; there is certainly none of the material laws which we know that enables us to understand how matter makes mind sad. Is it not more philosophical to suppose that there is some law which comprehends both natures? Still under it occasional phenomena might be expected to appear which would offer themselves as exceptions to the particular laws, but which were regular results of the more general one that comprehended them. According to this, when the sun stood still

in the midst of the heavens at the command of Joshua, and hastened not to go down for a whole day, all the material agents concerned in the phenomenon might be as really obeying a law of their being as in his daily setting: iron float upon the surface of the waters by a law as natural as that by which it sinks in ordinary circumstances: rain be withheld for three years at the prayer of Elisha as naturally it usually fell twice a year, the former rain and the latter rain in his season: Jordan part asunder and remain divided, by as sure a law as it flowed before and after continuously.—Such occurrences are contraventions of the general laws of matter which we have discovered, but they may result from a more general law which we have not discovered, and which, with our imperfect acquaintance with the spiritual world, we perhaps cannot discover—according to which, whatever forces of nature are required for the accomplishment of our prayers shall be obedient to us, if we ask anything according to God's will. Such a constitution of the world cannot be argued against from experience. It is in no degree inconsistent with anything that experience tells us, or even with any reasonable inference from what she tells. She tells us of certain effects from which we infer the existence of a general law. The hypothesis casts no doubt upon these effects, and does not represent this general law as false. It only represents to us that there is a more general law than the one which we have

discovered, which does not supersede the others, or in ordinary cases lead to different results—to allege experience against this is to talk without meaning. Indeed, most of the difficulties which would be urged against such a constitution of things would seem to argue a great forgetfulness that it is one which owes its existence and nature to the will of God.

If we believe that God prepared food for the Israelites during their journey through the wilderness, and for forty years sent it daily down to them from heaven, should we be thought to act reasonably if we withheld our belief from the part of the narrative which tells us, that if a man gathered more than was needed for his daily food upon any day but the sixth, what was left corrupted before the following morning; but that if a double portion was collected upon the sixth day, it continued good for food upon the seventh? Were a man to profess his disbelief of this upon the ground that there was nothing in the natural constitution of any body which should dispose it to resist decay longer regularly upon one day of the week than upon the rest, and that to suppose its constitution changed once a week to preserve the sanctity of the seventh day, is supposing what is contrary to all that we know of the connection of moral and material forces—if such an objection as this were raised to the narrative, would it not be felt that the infidelity occurred too late? For surely it is obvious to reply, when God prepared

this food could He not have imparted to it any properties that He pleased—this one to which you object no less than any others,—assigned to its production, duration, cessation, any laws that He pleased? If you will doubt the story, your doubts should begin earlier. That God should give manna this peculiar property admits of the same kind of account that His sending it at all does. The final cause of enduing it with this peculiar property is in substance the same as that of giving it the property of sustaining life and sending it to sustain the wants of His people. The power which was adequate to the one effect was evidently not unequal to the other. And the Being who was moved to the one exertion of power by the only motive which can be assigned, was evidently not unlikely to be moved to this further exertion when there was a similar motive to influence Him. You ought to reject the others, or admit this. I do not think there is anyone who would not acquiesce in the reasonableness of this mode of putting the case. I do not mean that a man would be constrained to yield belief to the whole narrative; but that he would not feel that he was at liberty to believe the rest of the narrative and to reject this part on such grounds as I have supposed. Yet we are evidently doing the same in principle when we believe the world to owe its existence to God; that He is the Author of the constitution and properties of all things material and immaterial; and yet, as it seems, most irrationally, make a

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special difficulty of believing that He has established such a connection between them that matter under a certain relation to mind shall exhibit different properties from those which experiments on it, apart from mind, are able to discover. When such phenomena are stated to have taken place in obedience to prayer, we may if we please describe the laws of nature as suspended or violated, if we only remember that by the laws of nature we mean those laws of matter which we have discovered, and that the whole amount of the improbability involved in the announcement, even upon the principles of the objector, is the improbability that observation of a part of the universe has not revealed to us the most general laws which govern the entire.

We have thus seen, that, supposing the constitution of the world to be this: that all events are brought about by forces acting according to general laws—and we can scarcely conceive its administration conducted by more impassive agents — no reasonable objection lies against the employment of prayer with a full persuasion of its efficacy, whether the object be to procure good or to avert evil; and this whether the good be temporal or spiritual. For that in accordance with the existence and constant operation of such forces, prayer may procure good and avert evil, both through the instrumentality of material and immaterial agents, each acting according to the laws for the regulation of each nature, the law which we have discovered

for body and the similar law which we may conceive regulates the operations of mind. And that to reconcile this supposition of the government of the world by general laws with some of the effects of prayer, in which the laws of the material world seem suspended or violated, no more is needed than to suppose that there exists a more general law than those which we have discovered, which comprehends them, and according to which, while each of their natures is removed from the influence of the other, all the phenomena would appear which ought to be expected according to the law which we have discovered, but under which also, in some cases of their connection, new, diverse, or opposite phenomena might occur.

In this way all objections of the kind that we have been considering may be shown to be unsound on the very principles on which they are offered. But I should be sorry to rest the duty on such considerations, or to derive the true motives to it from them. They are not intended to supply motives for the exercise of prayer, but to secure to the true motives their fair force, by taking away the obstacles to their operation which are raised by such suggestions, as that we are engaged in an irrational service. To show that, when we cast ourselves upon God in prayer, in obedience to His invitations thus to draw near Him; when in bitter anguish or in strong fear we implore Him to avert from us the evil that we endure or dread; when under a deep sense of want we have recourse to

Him to supply our necessities, to continue or to augment the blessings which He has bestowed upon us,—our faith need not waver, nor our earnestness abate, because certain sciolists have discovered that we are asking for something which it is already irrevocably fixed that we shall receive, or that we shall not receive.

To show the futility of such objections is not to supply the true motives to prayer, it is only to leave the proper motives to act unimpeded. These are not to be derived from human reason; but from the Divine commands, revelation, and promises. And in contrasting those motives which are thus supplied to an earnest and hearty prayer with the best which human reason can provide, we should see new cause to acknowledge our obligations to the light which has relieved us from so many doubts and perplexities, and given us so sure a rule of life, and such prevailing motives to follow it.

II.

But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day.—MATT. xxiv. 20.

IN choosing this text when I last addressed you, my brethren, I had no intention of engaging in the consideration of the awful prediction in which it occurs, or of the memorable events in which the prediction was accomplished. I chose it merely because it naturally suggested, or at least seemed fitted to introduce easily, some common objections to the efficacy of prayer which I thought it important that we should review. And I am about to use it now in the same way, because I wish to continue the limited consideration of that most important subject to which I then confined myself, in the hope that it may help to recall to the minds of some who then heard me so much of what I said, as may make what I desire to add to it more easily understood.

The objection to prayer which the exhortation of the Lord suggested to us was the old and obvious

one: that in addressing supplications to God we are seeking to procure what must be given to us, or what cannot be given to us: what must be given, though we should be silent, or what must be withheld, however earnestly and long we pray: That what is to happen is as certain to Him, as what has happened is to us, and that therefore in fact it would be as reasonable to attempt to alter by prayer what has already come to pass, as what is yet to come. The fact that the subject of our prayers is still future hides it from our eyes indeed, and makes it uncertain whether it shall happen, or how. But reason assures us that this is an uncertainty not belonging to the nature of such events, but to the nature of our finite minds and to their limited perceptions; that in the Divine mind, the event is as certain now as it will be when *it has passed*, and therefore is as absolutely fixed in itself. And that, if this be the case, assuredly it is as purposeless to supplicate God, now, to bestow or to withhold anything to-morrow, as it would be to implore Him to do or to undo what occurred yesterday.

To this old and obvious objection, the obvious and, I dare say, very old reply was made, that if reason will be consistent she must not stop here. For that this argument to prove the inutility of prayer, equally establishes the inutility of all means. Of any means whatever, which I employ to bring about an event, may it not be said—and just as soundly and forcibly said—that what I desire to effect is already fixed; that it is fixed,

that is, that it shall be, or that it shall not be, because it is known to God that it shall be, or that it shall not be,—that the future is in this way as fixed as the past, and that therefore, when I do anything to cause or to prevent something yet to come, my labour is as unprofitably employed as if it were employed to alter the past?

Is not this reasoning just as good as the former? and if it does not prove the inefficacy of other means, why should it be taken to prove the inefficacy of prayer? If it does not take away the motives under which we lie to employ other means, or impair their force, why should it incline us to cease from prayer, or cause us to pray languidly?

This practical mode of dealing with the difficulty is enough for my purpose. It is confessed that there is a very great difficulty in speculation, in reconciling the freedom of the will to the foreknowledge of God, so great, that some have sought a relief from it in the denial of the human will, and some in the denial of the Divine foreknowledge of the actions dependent upon the will. Other, and I think more sober-minded reasoners, feel that they cannot doubt, either, on the one hand, that the freedom of the will is not merely to be inferred from what we feel, and what is revealed to us of our own accountableness; but that it is most decidedly and directly established by our own consciousness; and that while prophecy conclusively proves God's foreknowledge of acts dependent upon the Will of God, it would be rash and

presumptuous to deny this or any other of His perfections,—because from the imperfection of our own minds we cannot conceive how it can exist or be exercised; because we cannot understand how a free act can be certainly foreseen, shall we deny that God, who is not limited to our few and uncertain means of collecting what is to come, can certainly foresee the act, and foresee that it should be freely performed? I think it is clear that we are acting very unwisely and very rashly if we do. And accordingly, I believe the determination of those who have considered this perplexing subject most deeply, and who have been best able to consider it soundly, has been that we have the best proof that the nature of the case admits, both of the Divine foreknowledge and of the freedom of man's will, and that therefore both are to be believed, whatever be the difficulty of reconciling them.

But this is a difficulty which no one who is capable of understanding it would think of handling incidentally. And I only wish you to remark that all that I have said of prayer is unaffected by this further question. It is obvious that prayer bears the same relation to God's foreknowledge that all other voluntary acts do: that so far as that is concerned there is nothing peculiar in prayer. If therefore in the business of common life, it would be felt to be an outrage upon common sense to urge God's foresight as a reason for neglecting the use of all means to bring about the ends that we desire, why should we regard it as offering any

reason to slacken our diligence in prayer, or abate our motives to employ it?

Can we give any other account of this inconsistency except the one which is so often forced upon us, not merely by the diligence and energy with which we labour for the meat that perisheth contrasted with the languor and apathy with which we look for that which endureth unto eternal life, but also when we compare the measure of wisdom and soundness of judgment which we are able to exercise upon the various questions which each pursuit offers to our reason—that this world is naturally too near our hearts to allow us to conceive any of its interests except upon practical principles, while our concern in the unseen world is not strong enough to offer any impediment to treating all that appertains to it as pure matter of speculation? And accordingly we find that the poorest sophistry of the sceptic can bewilder and unsettle us when it is employed about our spiritual interests, while he exhausts all the resources of his craft in vain to disturb any practical principle relating to the affairs of this world.

But, in the case of prayer, there is something, beyond this indifference, which in religious questions generally lays us open to disturbances from reasoning, that common sense thrusts aside in all the business of common life. It is not merely because the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, which we are commanded first to seek, are indifferent to us that we are so easily beguiled or perplexed;

but because the communion with God to which prayer leads is naturally distasteful to us, that we lend a ready ear in this case to arguments which, if they were urged against the employment of means engaging us in pursuits more congenial to our degraded natures, would be rejected, without being thought worthy to deserve a serious reply.

It is plainly our dishonesty of mind, as well as our indifference, which makes it necessary to provide any answer to such difficulties in the case. I trust that for all important purposes the answer given is a sufficient one. But we can hardly flatter ourselves that such sceptical resistance to the efficacy of prayer is at an end when this difficulty is thus answered, particularly as the answer seems on the same principle to lie open to the very obvious objection of which I next took notice.

The answer, it may be said, assumes a point which, if it be not the only one at issue, is just as little likely to be granted. It assumes that prayer is entitled to be ranked among the means by which events are to be brought about or prevented. And this is contrary to experience. Experience shows us that we are living in a world governed by general laws—a world in which all things are endowed with certain properties, whereby they are fitted to produce certain regular effects upon each other; and not only so—not only that certain effects result, according to the constitution of things, from certain causes, but that they require such causes for their production—that to the

existence of the effect the operation of the proper cause is required. This, experience tells us; and the knowledge is a sufficiently rational motive to the employment of all means which, according to this system of causation, are fitted to produce the end that we desire: but it is sufficient, too, to show the absurdity of expecting to obtain the end without any means, or by employing as means something which, according to these general laws, can produce no such effect.

But prayer has no place in this system of natural causes; it can only be efficacious by a suspension or violation of those general laws, the permanence of which is a first principle; the principle which lies at the foundation of all our industry, prudence, and foresight in the affairs of this life—all our investigation of nature and providence to extend our knowledge of God's character and of His works—and all the use which we make of this knowledge which we have acquired, whether it be for the establishment of the principles of Natural Religion, or for the improvement of the arts and extension of the comforts of common life.

This seems the best mode of dealing with the case which lies open to the objectors. And you see that it concedes two points, which indeed must be conceded by all who have not lost their natural reason, or who do not pervert or belie its dictates.

That the certainty of an event in the Divine foresight offers no reason for our neglecting to use all suitable means to bring it about or to avert it, and

therefore that, if there be any events of which prayer may be the cause, it is reasonable to employ it to procure or to prevent them. We are therefore at liberty, in considering the subject, to put out of view the fore-knowledge of God, or the certainty of future events, and to make this the sole question—Is the constitution of the world in which God has placed us incompatible with the efficacy of prayer? Or, as it is imagined that it is specially with the existence and permanence of general laws that it is inconsistent, we may treat the whole inquiry as entirely depending upon the decision of this more limited question—Is the efficacy of prayer inconsistent with the existence and permanence of those general laws by which, experience informs us, the world is governed?

I argued this question entirely on the principles of the objectors, and supposed, with them, that God, having bestowed certain permanent properties upon mind and matter, under which both natures act according to general laws, has left without further interference the various corporeal and spiritual substances which He created to the mutual actions which result from such properties. And I desired to show you, that, without attempting to settle whether this conception of the constitution and government of the universe be right or wrong, but admitting that it is right, it by no means follows from it that prayer can have no legitimate place in such a scheme of causation as it supposes—that it is really only from a misconception of the true nature

of general laws that any incompatibility between them and the operation of prayer can be apprehended.

I cannot of course go through the reasoning by which I endeavoured to establish this; but I can only remind you, that, considering the subjects of prayer, it was shown that its efficacy, in any case in which we can reasonably desire to employ it, is not only perfectly consistent with such a plan for the government of the world, but may form a part of it; and that therefore such a constitution of the world offers no rational objection to the employment of prayer with a full persuasion of its efficacy, whether the object be to procure good or to avert evil, and this, whether the good be spiritual or natural.

For that, presuming the existence of such a constitution of things, prayer may procure good and avert evil of both kinds, through the instrumentality of spiritual and corporeal agencies, each acting according to the laws which we have discovered for body, and any similar law by which the mutual operations of spirit may be regulated; and that, to reconcile recorded or promised effects of prayer, in which these laws appear suspended or violated, with the government of the world by general laws, nothing more is needed than the reasonable supposition that there exists a more general law than we have yet discovered, which comprehends material and spiritual natures, and regulates not only their separate but their joint and reciprocal actions; according to which, in ordinary cases in which

matter and mind were removed from each other's influence, each would go on exhibiting all the phenomena which they ought, according to their respective laws, but under which also, in cases of their connection and mutual action, effects of a very different kind might be expected to take place. This was the point to which I brought the question on the last day on which I addressed you. But having done so, I was anxious to impress upon you that what was done was not to be regarded as laying the foundation on which it was proposed to rest the duty of prayer, or from which the true motives to the performance of the duty were to be derived.

Indeed, I have resumed the subject principally with the view of impressing this caution more distinctly upon you, and explaining to you more fully the grounds on which it rests. But what I have to say on the point will come in better after we have considered another and more popular objection, in dealing with which it is even more important to remember how much such answers as we are giving to such difficulties may be misunderstood and abused.

Even supposing all that I have attempted to show fully established, and so all difficulties grounded upon the constitution of the world wholly removed, the same questioning spirit may still provide us with some new occupation of the same kind. For all that is thus shown is, that there is nothing in the laws of nature which God has established to

prevent the efficacy of prayer. It is still to be considered whether we can expect an answer to it consistently with what we know of His own character. Suppose that He has left Himself the power of hearing prayer, is it compatible with any just views of His nature to believe that He has the will? Can it be needful to inform Him of our wants and our desires? Does He not already know them? Can it be useful to supplicate Him for relief? If He does not see fit Himself to gratify our desires, or to supply our necessities, will our pleading with Him show Him that He ought, or will our solicitations move Him to do that which He ought not? Surely it must be felt that the whole process of telling God what we want, what we desire, or what we fear, and soliciting Him to relieve or defend us, is one altogether accommodated to man's ignorance and weakness, and derived from them; and that it can only be applied to God under a forgetfulness or ignorance of His true nature, intellectual and moral. A fellow-creature who can serve us may be ignorant of our necessities, and require that they should be made known to him, or he may be careless about them, and it may be needful to make him feel them. His sense of duty may require to be stimulated by the emotion of compassion. We may even owe his good offices to importunity. But everyone must feel that we cannot suppose an analogy in any of these points in our relation to God, without offending against all sound views of His nature.

Shall we treat Him as if He were ignorant or unjust like one of ourselves; as if we could wring from His compassion what His justice denied us, or weary Him by our importunities to grant what both justice and compassion withhold from us?

To this it has often been answered that it proceeds upon a false supposition, that it puts out of view altogether the moral changes which prayer effects or occasions. It presumes a man to be in all respects the same when the blessing was withheld and when it was bestowed--except that in the interval he has uttered some prayer. It must be on some such supposition that it is triumphantly asked, "Is it accordant with any just notions of the nature of the unchangeable God to believe that His conduct towards us can be so greatly changed by our prayers?" For it is only upon such a supposition that there is any point in the question. And it seems enough to answer, that though God is unchangeable, man is not; and that what might be proper to withhold in a certain state of our dispositions and affections, it might be perfectly right to bestow upon us in another state. Indeed, even if we continued always the same, it might be no impeachment of God's immutability, or indeed of any of His infinite perfections, that His dealings towards us should greatly alter. Such a change in His mode of acting on us might be wise and benevolent, although we continued unchanged, nay, because we continued unchanged. But at all events, there can be no pretext for raising any

difficulty about it, if we ourselves be changed. It would be unreasonable, however, to ascribe any part of the change in God's dealings with us to our prayer, supposing it to be neither the cause nor the occasion of a change in us. But it is very easily shown that it may be both, upon the natural principles upon which we are arguing. It has been often shown, indeed, how well the exercise is fitted to try us, and to prove us, and to set us before our own eyes—to make us be still and know that He is God; that in preparing for such communion with God, and in so communing with Him, we are likely to be made to feel more deeply our own weakness and His strength; that it is fitted to bring back our sins and His mercy to our remembrance, until our spirits are humbled and softened, our self-abasement deepened, our self-dependence annihilated — until we are made to abhor ourselves and to repent in dust and ashes. It requires indeed but a little calm consideration of the case to see what very important changes we may undergo, and upon natural principles ought to undergo, as we prepare for this sacrifice and offer it; how every disposition which suits our relation to God, and which He has exhorted us to cultivate, is brought into exercise and improved by it. And that therefore, in perfect consistency with God's unchangeableness, and without any impeachment of any of His infinite perfections, He may give to prayer what He withholds until it is asked for.

I do not think it necessary to dwell upon this

answer, or even to give it more fully, because it is, in substance, familiar to everyone. I think it much more important to supply some safeguards which it seems to require, than to endeavour to expand it or to give it strength. I can have no objection to the answer; for, rightly understood, it is very sound and, rightly used, it is very salutary. But, here as before, the true use of such answers is to restore us to the state in which we were before any doubts were attempted to be raised of the Scripture representations that God is a Hearer of Prayer. And here, even more than before, we shall be injured rather than benefited if we forget this. If it be confined to correcting this first mistake, which separates the act of prayer from the dispositions which accompany it and form an essential part of prayer, properly so called—if it be confined to correcting this mistake and the mistakes dependent upon it—it is very useful and necessary; but it may be so employed as to fall in with the views of the nature of God on which those objections are grounded, and then it shares in their presumption and in all their evil effects.

The case seems in this respect just the same as before, when it is said, "Prayer cannot be of any avail, for the world is governed by general laws, which can neither be violated nor suspended:" it seems in various ways useful to show that the efficacy of prayer is perfectly compatible with the existence and operation of general laws in the

abstract, and that it does not suppose the suspension or violation of any general laws which we have any certain knowledge, or any good reason to believe, exist in the world. So here again, when it is argued that God's unchangeableness or any of His perfections must set Him beyond reach of our supplications, it may be useful to show that we do not necessarily suppose God to be changeable in any sense which implies imperfection, when we regard Him as a hearer of prayer, but that, according to the objectors' notions of the nature of His immutability, this character may belong to Him. But as we were careful to take this description of God's government of the world only to reason upon it in refutation of the false inferences from it, not to make it the foundation of our own expectations from prayer, even so, and more careful ought we to be, not to adopt their representations of the Divine character, any further than to show in the same way that it does not supply fairly the objections which they have derived from it. It is a case in which it seems especially needful to remember the caution of the wise king, who seems to warn us, that though in dealing with the errors of another it may be needful for his sake at times to reason with him upon his own principles, yet that we run some risk in the occupation of being infected with them. "Answer a fool," he says, "according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit;" but he also says, "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou be like him."

The true motives to prayer are to be found in the Scripture representations of God as a hearer of prayer, and the invitations founded upon them to draw near to Him, and on the promises made in His name to all who so approach Him. These are the proper motives to engage believers in their duty, and to sustain them in it. But the force of such motives is liable to be very greatly diminished by objections which affect to show that such representations of His Word are inconsistent with the constitution of nature which He has established, or with His own character. When our unquiet minds suggest such objections, it is needful to answer them. And the most promising mode of dealing with such objectors is to show that they are mistaken in the legitimate consequences of their own representations of the constitution of nature and of the character of its Author; that taking their account as a true and adequate one, it does nothing to invalidate the Scripture representations of the efficacy of prayer. But such a mode of treating these objections ought not to be taken as doing anything more, or seeking to do anything more, than to place us again under the motives which are held out to prayer in Scripture, by overthrowing arguments which aim at the credibility of the encouragements offered to it there. This is the most that ought ever to be attempted by reasoning on the subject, for it is certainly the best that reason can do for us in this case. I am far from saying, or from thinking,

that no motives to approach the great Author of our being would be found out by Reason. I am sure there are. But then, I am sure too that she suggests many and grievous discouragements; and that, under the best light that Reason can afford, much painful perplexity must have been felt about the duty by all thoughtful minds; and that many alternations of doubt and confidence, of hope and fear, must have been the lot of all who were left to the knowledge of their relation to God which their own reason in its best state was able to discover. And it would be miserable perverseness for those upon whose path the bright light of Revelation is shining to turn back, to grope their way in the dim twilight of Natural Religion.

Indeed, not only is it a preposterous mistake for those to whom Scripture has been given to resort to Reason for the true motives to prayer, or for any addition to the true motives; but we can hardly employ her aid in explaining and indicating those which Revelation has provided without running some risk of impairing their force. It is one of the cases in which Divine and Human wisdom appear in something of their just contrast. The Word of God here, as well as elsewhere, addresses directly the feelings which it desires to raise, and seeks to move them by offering their proper objects to them and leaving the matter there. We are obliged to bring in Reason to the defence of Revelation, but we shall find that when she has done all that she can, if we will

take her representations of the state of the case as the source of our motives to the discharge of this duty, we are substituting, for this direct and natural process of moving the affections, an indirect and artificial one. The fact is one which it is important for us fully to acquaint ourselves with, but the inference from it, when we know it, is not that we should reject the aid of Reason in the case, but that we should confine her strictly to an auxiliary capacity.

In the Bible, believers are invited to draw near to God, to make all their wants and desires freely known to Him: to press them with importunity upon Him: they are encouraged to pray to Him by the assurance that He heareth prayer, and to cast all their care upon Him as upon One that careth for them: they are taught to look upon Him as a Father, and assured that, like as a father pitieth his own children, even so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. Even reasoning is descended to, to dispel their doubts and fears; they are reminded of the effects of parental affection even upon our own bad and selfish hearts, and are asked: can they think that their heavenly Father feels less for His children's wants, or is less ready to hear their petitions? He is their reconciled Father in Christ Jesus, and they are reminded that He spared not His only-begotten Son, but delivered Him up for us all; and are asked, How shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? This is the way in which the Bible

encourages us to prayer and assures us of its efficacy. It encourages us to draw nigh unto God with the assurance that He will draw nigh to us, that He will hear our cry, and will help us; that He is full of compassion, slow to anger and of great mercy, and repenteth Him of the evil—that if we ask we shall have, if we seek we shall find.

One man doubts whether this be consistent with the government of the world by general laws; and another, whether it is consistent with the perfections of the infinite and unchangeable God. Reason replies as you have heard, and shows that prayer is so fitted to produce a moral change in us, that it puts us in quite a new relation to all the sources of good and evil that can be influenced by moral causes; that whether, we regard ourselves as owing its accomplishment to the will of God operating immediately, or to the same will operating through the instrumentality of forces acting according to laws which He has established, and whichever supposition we make, we may hope for the success of our prayers without regarding the laws as changeable or their Author changeable—changeable in any sense which arraigns any one of His infinite perfections. So far, Reason is but an auxiliary, and a useful one. We are only dissipating by a right use of Reason doubts and difficulties which an abuse of Reason had raised. But beyond this, we must be very careful how we allow her to interfere. I do not mean that we are to make no

further use of the important fact concerning prayer which she enables us to see so distinctly, and which we must in some degree hold, whatever be the supposition which we make of the way in which prayer is answered. We must either regard God as answering prayer directly, or answering it through a fixed constitution by which He has so combined into one system the spiritual and moral natures which He has created as to allow prayer a place among the causes by which good and evil are procured and averted in the world. Either is a perfectly intelligible hypothesis, and neither is an unreasonable one. But whichever we adopt, Reason seems almost equally to show the infinite importance of the state of mind and affections of the suppliant, and of the temper and spirit in which his prayers are offered; and not only so, but so far as she can see the grounds of the appointed efficacy of prayer, she would make it a cause only as it is instrumental in producing in us some salutary change. We may of course owe the bestowal of good and the removal of evil to God's free mercy, or to a *bye* operation of the general laws which He has established: but so far as it is due to prayer, it would seem to Reason that it must be entirely due to the moral change which prayer effects or occasions in us. On the first supposition, in which God is the immediate source of what we receive, because prayer made us meeter objects of His bounty; upon the other supposition, in which it would still appear that prayer could only move

those spiritual agencies by whose power over mind and matter it is to procure good for us, as it produced or occasioned some change in ourselves which altered our relation to them—and without which, however free they be, they would have no more power to accomplish our desires than the inert forms of matter have to obey our will unless we bring the required degree of energy under the guidance of the due degree of skill to bear upon them. That such considerations may be employed to restrain us from bringing into the service of the Most High any dispositions which are unbefitting such an exercise, or to prevent us from indulging in the vain expectation of receiving an answer to our prayer while we cherish unholy or malignant tempers or indulge in evil practices, is unquestionable; nay, more, that they may even move us profitably to cultivate such dispositions and affections as may make us more acceptable to God is not to be doubted. They are so employed from time to time in the Bible; but we have need to watch very carefully to keep all such in the subordinate place in which they are there kept, and not to suffer them to usurp the principal place, which certainly does not belong to them. The Bible seeks to produce fervency of prayer by producing in us a sense of want, a conviction of guilt; by an apprehension of danger; and by holding out to us One, who is able to relieve, to forgive, and to defend us; and by assuring us, that He needs only to be asked, to pardon all our offences, to

supply all our necessities and to banish all our fears. Just consider how fitted this course is to produce in us the desired emotions—what would be the fervency of the supplications which such natural emotions of fear and sorrow, and need and hope, would inspire. And think how ill fitted the process which Reason substitutes is to raise the emotions; how little the motives at her command are fitted to supply the place of forces so wisely accommodated to our nature; how much more likely indeed to interrupt their operation than to aid it, and to abate their natural strength than to add to it. For Reason, as we have seen, does not propose to produce self-abasement by a sense of guilt, fear by an apprehension of danger, and hope by a prospect of deliverance, but to excite all these feelings by the consideration that, the more strongly they exist in us, the meeter objects we are of the bounty or of the mercy of God—that, the deeper our humility is, the livelier our fears and the firmer our hopes, the more likely we are to obtain pardon and relief. This engages us, so far as it produces any effect upon us, in a direct effort to raise such feelings in our minds from a sense of the advantage which is likely to accrue to us from possessing them—an effort from which we naturally recoil, and which, from our constitution, can never be very efficacious, and which often defeats its own object—whereas, in the way of operating upon us which the Bible employs, the tempers and feelings which it is in-

tended to raise in us are excited, not by any act of our will founded upon a rational conviction of their usefulness, but by the action of the proper objects of those affections, which operate not through our will, or even with its concurrence, but directly, and, according to the established principles of our constitution, with certainty and force. But what is perhaps more to be apprehended from such interference, if it be not carefully guarded against, is that it should disturb the Scriptural representations of the character of God—and more especially under our new relation to Him by which we are encouraged to draw near Him in prayer, or should impede the natural effects which they were intended to produce upon our hearts. In general, it may be easily understood from what has been said how this evil tendency arises.

But to make its true extent and true nature fully understood would require more time than I could now bestow upon it. I trust, however, that without pressing such considerations further, I have said enough to show how needful it is, in resorting to the aid of Reason in this case, to confine her to her proper office, and that I have made clear what her proper office is, and when she goes beyond it; that we ought not to employ her to discover new motives to urge us to the duty of prayer and to sustain us in it, or to add strength to those which Revelation has provided; that the best service she can render us consists in removing such difficulties as interfere with the free action of

such motives upon our minds, and then leaving their operations undisturbed; that when doubts are raised whether prayer be a reasonable service, or when doubts are cast upon the representations of God's nature, the invitations and the promises by which His word seeks to engage us in it; we may profitably employ Reason to dispel them; but that when she has effected the end for which she was called in, the sooner that we return to those motives to prayer which Scripture offers to us, from which we were for a while withdrawn by sophistry, and the more simply and truly that we surrender ourselves to their influence, and the more abidingly that we live under them, the more likely are we, upon the best known and best established principles of our mental constitution, to experience all the best effects of prayer in our own souls—and the more likely, according to Reason not less than Revelation, to bring down from above all the blessings that we seek by prayer.

III.

But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day.—Matt. xxiv. 20.

Upon the two last opportunities on which I addressed you, my brethren, I took occasion from this text to bring before you some objections against the efficacy of prayer which, I suppose, have at some time or other disturbed almost every mind. I do not propose now to extend the very limited consideration of the subject to which I then confined myself, nor have I any intention of adding much to the solutions which I then gave of the difficulties which I attempted to satisfy. But as part of what I said is liable to be misconceived or abused, I am anxious to supply, before I finally leave the subject, some explanations and cautions which, if they be not absolutely necessary to render what was said safe, will, I hope, make it better apprehended and more easily applied.

The objections which we first considered were those which are suggested by the foresight of

God, or by the supposed constitution of the world and its government by general laws. And I endeavoured to show you that, adopting with qualifications the principles of the objectors, we are not at liberty to acquiesce in their inferences; that as to the foreknowledge of God, it is only embarrassing needlessly the inquiry to take it at all into consideration; that it not only is not itself a cause of any events, but that it does nothing to interfere with any existing causes—that it leaves the system of causation altogether unchanged. So that if prayer might be efficacious in procuring good for us, supposing the Divine foresight not to exist, the foresight would not deprive it of any part of its efficacy.

This, which is abundantly obvious, reduced the whole inquiry to the question, Does this system—the system of causation which exists in the world—admit prayer among the causes of good and evil? I attempted to show you that it does: that prayer may be efficacious consistently with what we know of the constitution of the world, and without violating or suspending any general law of which experience gives us any certain knowledge.

I am quite sure that if the fact were the reverse, that is, if it were necessary to suppose that the laws of Nature (as they are called) with which experience has acquainted us were suspended whenever prayer is answered, this ought not to abate the confidence with which we pray. Because we

have full assurance that the exhortation to pray, and the promises to prayer, which abound in the Bible, come really from the Author of all the forces of Nature and all her laws. And, if He tells us expressly that He is ready to answer prayer, and if the promise can only be fulfilled by restraining these forces, by suspending or changing the operation of these laws, everyone who considers the question fairly and intelligently must feel that it would be the weakest and most irrational presumption to doubt the declaration. And if it be said that this is not what is done—that the objectors do not doubt the truth of any declaration which they believe God to have made, but that such a declaration as this is so inconsistent with what He allows us to hear of His purposes in another way that they think they have good reason to doubt that He has made it—if this be said, I will not engage in the consideration whether we have greater certainty that the Bible is His Word than that we are rightly interpreting the information concerning His government of the world which we receive from experience—I will not engage in this, which would be a protracted inquiry—it is enough to reply, as we can reply, that it is only through a great misconception of the true state of the case that any inconsistency is apprehended to exist between such promises to prayer and any certain knowledge of God's plans which we obtain in any other way.

It is sometimes argued as if we had such

knowledge in our intuitive impressions of the permanence of the forces with which observation makes us acquainted and of the uniformity of their operations. Such impressions spring from the mental constitution which God has bestowed on us; and it is sometimes argued that in thus giving such impressions God really makes an engagement for the inviolability of Nature's laws—an engagement which of course cannot be broken, and which gives good ground to doubt that any declaration that represents these laws as changeable can come from Him. I am sure there is a very general mistake as to the nature and amount of this engagement—a mistake which is probably founded upon a misconception of the process by which we become acquainted with it. It would require a good deal of time fully to expose and rectify these mistakes, but very little will suffice to show that we are dealing very unfairly with the subject when we represent this engagement as inconsistent with the efficacy of prayer.

Whatever be the true amount of this engagement, we show clearly in other cases how we understand it. And it is, I think, only by a very inconsistent interpretation of it in the case of prayer that the presumed contrariety is made out. The impression is just as strong where our acquaintance with Nature's forces is most limited as where it is most extended—just as strong in the rudest minds as in the most cultivated. It as much belongs to the simple forces with which we

are first acquainted in childhood as to the utmost range of natural forces that we can ever arrive at in the fullest maturity of our intellect; and this engagement, therefore, is alike for each and all of them. However we first understand the engagement, therefore, we soon learn that it is so to be understood as to allow for the control of one of these forces by some one of the others, or by all of them—for the modification of the effects of one by the operation of others. This we experience to be true with respect to all the forces which we already know, and therefore this engagement with respect to each and all of these must be so understood as to allow for such a modification of the effects of any one of them that the actual phenomena shall differ in any conceivable degree from those which would occur if this one were undisturbed in its operation; that, in fact, none of the phenomena which would in that case be expected may actually appear, or that directly opposite ones may appear. This is the utmost extent of the engagement, as experience obliges us to interpret it. However permanent any force may be, and however uniform its operation, it is liable in any degree to be controlled, and its effects in any degree altered, by some other force. And as, further, this engagement cannot be interpreted to convey to us an assurance that there are no forces existing except those that we have discovered, we never are absurd enough to reject any sufficient testimony to the existence of a new force on the

ground that it would be inconsistent with the engagement which God has made of the permanence of those forces which we already know. We, on the contrary, hold ourselves open at all times to evidence of the existence of a new force, and with the knowledge that, if it exist, it may alter the effects of any of those with which we are already acquainted.

Now, if Revelation informs us of the existence of such a force in prayer, have we any grounds for arguing from this engagement against the credibility of the information? I do not mean, have we any grounds according to the true meaning of this engagement?—I mean, have we any grounds for such reasoning according to what we show incontestably to be our own interpretation of this engagement? I think it is evident that we have not, and that we only imagine that we have because we are habituated to unfairness in all such cases—habituated to applying such different measures of belief to the things of Eternity and the things of Time—the things of the unseen and of the visible world—that we often reject as incredible in the one case what we receive without scruple or difficulty in the other.

I am anxious that you should understand distinctly that I do not hold it to be necessary, in order to vindicate the reasonableness of our belief in the efficacy of prayer, that we should be able to show that its ordinary operation does not require the suspension of those forces of Nature

with which an observation of her course has acquainted us. But you will remember that I was able to show this—and that, going through the various objects of our prayers, we saw that there is nothing which we can desire for our spiritual life, and nothing which we ought to desire for our natural life, for which we may not offer prayer to God in full assurance that He can hear us and answer us, in perfect consistency with all that we know, or with any good ground surmise, concerning the general laws which He has established for the government of the world.

This would seem abundantly sufficient to vindicate the reasonableness of prayer to the utmost extent to which we are concerned, or, as it seems, can desire to offer it. But though the subject is thus freed from the difficulties which affect it as regards our personal relation to God and the discharge of the duty towards Him, yet there are others which attach to it, as it is presented to us in His holy Word, which ought not to be passed over without some notice.

In the historical statements of holy Scripture, and in its declarations and promises concerning prayer, we find effects ascribed to it which, as it appears, could not be produced without a suspension or violation of the natural laws by which the world is governed. We ought not to come to this conclusion in any particular case without the most careful consideration, because such appearances of violation or suspension of physical laws is very

often delusive, arising from the operation of some force with which we are unacquainted, or the presence of which we are not aware of or do not make allowance for. If, for example, the old story of Mahomed's coffin were true, the spectator who entered the tomb of the false prophet would see a heavy body sustained in mid-air, and would conclude, on what would seem to be unimpeachable evidence, that this was an exceptional instance in which the force of gravity ceased to act. But when the real state of the case was explained, he would see that the operation of gravity was no more interrupted than if the coffin rested upon a solid pillar, or was sustained by chains from its four corners attached to fixed points; that, in fact, it was only a case in which one natural force was counteracted by another.

That the story is not true does not render it unfit to be used as an illustration of the principle; but indeed, if it were otherwise, we need not have travelled so far, or ventured upon any uncertain ground for an illustration of it. Every balloon, as it ascends and remains fixed or moves in the air, presents the same kind of violation or suspension of the law of gravity to everyone who is ignorant of the explanation of the phenomenon. And this is only one of a great number of illustrations of the same kind which offer themselves to our observation in the common course of our every-day lives.

Again, the law under which an effect is produced

may be really a more general one than we suppose, and the result which would be anomalous or exceptional under the supposed law, may be perfectly regular under the law which is actually in operation. And it is conceivable that such a mistake may be committed, even when that law is a known one, and the law according to which we suppose it to act has been derived from a large induction, and tested upon an extensive scale.

Some of my hearers will probably remember an interesting illustration of this principle which the history of physical astronomy supplies, and which will make, what may be felt to be obscure when thus stated in the abstract, easy to be understood. Among the lunar perturbations there was one—the motion of the moon's apogee—which furnished for a good while a very difficult problem for astronomers. In fact, for more than half a century, the most eminent mathematicians, from Newton himself down, were unable to reconcile the calculated and observed rate of motion. So much, many of you know, and all will know, for it is told in the text book of astronomy which is used in your undergraduate course.[1]

[1] "The difficulty of the acceleration of the moon's motion yet remained—and it had fully as much occupied the attention of those who endeavoured to improve Physical Astronomy, as that just mentioned.

"The Royal Academy of Science at Paris had proposed it several times as the subject of their prize. It had eluded the researches of La Grange, yet his investigations on the subject gained the prize in 1772. Bossut had endeavoured to explain it by the

And it is likely that some of you may have learned that the distinguished mathematician who finally gave a perfect solution of this intractable problem, had at one time attempted to solve it, on the hypothesis that the true law of gravity was really more complex than the one which Newton was supposed to have established so conclusively. The two laws were so related that there was no appreciable difference in the results obtained from them, when great distances were concerned. But the difference became sensible at smaller distances,

resistance of an ether or subtile fluid pervading the whole system. La Place endeavoured to explain it by supposing that the transmission of gravity like that of light was not instantaneous, and on this hypothesis he made some important investigations. At length in 1787 La Place himself discovered the true cause—that it was a simple result of the laws of gravity. The actions of the Planets, besides changing the plane of the earth's orbit, change also its eccentricity. The eccentricity now is diminishing and will for many ages to come continue to do so. It will afterwards increase, and thus be subject to permanent changes. These changes will affect, through the action of the sun, the angular velocity of the moon about the earth, and hence at the present time an acceleration takes place. Nothing can be more satisfactory than the results of La Place on this subject. He has shown that the mean motions of the apogee and of the node are affected by the same cause, and it appears that the quantities assigned by computation agree with the results arising from a comparison of ancient and modern observations.

"The true cause of the acceleration or secular equation of the moon's mean motion being discovered, La Place's former investigations on the hypothesis that the transmission of gravity was not instantaneous have served to prove that the transmission of gravity, if not instantaneous, is immeasurably greater than that of light."—Brinkley's *Elements of Astronomy* (2nd. Edit., Dublin, 1819, p. 281. See also pp. 183—4, sections 230—349).

and so, while the Newtonian law served for the planets, it led into error, when applied to the moon, which is so very much nearer its central body than they are to theirs. It is true that this ingenious hypothesis of the Newtonian law turned out to be no better founded than the story of Mohammed's coffin. But like the fable referred to, it serves no less than if it were true for an illustration. For it makes it easy to understand how we may be led to conclude erroneously that a certain effect is brought about in opposition to nature's laws, when in fact, our own judgment is misled by assuming a law which is less general than the one which actually applies in the case. This illustration shows that there is nothing unscientific in supposing that such a law may seem to be established by a legitimate process, and tested by wide experience, and therefore be undoubtedly true, and yet after all may only apply within certain limits; while for cases beyond we must resort to the more general law which comprehends it, and which therefore applies to all cases whether within or without the limit.

What has been said ought to be enough to show how we may be greatly mistaken in supposing that in a particular case, a natural law is suspended or violated, and how an appearance of such suspension or violation may occur while it is really strictly maintained. And there are no doubt other ways in which we may fall into the same error.

But finally I endeavoured to show you how the

argument used by me might be extended even to those recorded or promised effects of prayer in which there is a real suspension or contravention of those laws of matter which we have derived from observation. I showed you that these are all easily reconciled to the supposition of the government of the world by general laws if only we will recollect that there are spiritual as well as material existences in the universe; and if only we will suppose that there are certain conjunctures which bring matter under the influence of spiritual agency as naturally as it ordinarily yields only to mechanical. There is often, I believe, an apprehension that there is such a wide difference between the two natures as would forbid the exercise of such a force. But the effects of mind upon matter in our own persons are quite sufficient to show that such an apprehension is altogether groundless, and that spirit actually possesses energies which give it a command over the forces of inert matter. This cannot be doubted, I say, by any one who considers for a moment what he is every moment experiencing in his own person. Now that intermediate spirits are allowed under certain circumstances to exercise these or any other powers which they naturally possess, cannot reasonably be regarded as incredible. Indeed, on the contrary, it would be very hard to believe that they were gifted with any powers which they were never to exercise. But that if such energies are actually exerted by them in our material world, a

contravention of the laws of matter would or might take place is abundantly evident. And finally, it can hardly be made a difficulty that such energies should be excited and regulated by moral causes—prayer for example or any others.

Yet plainly, this series of acknowledged facts, and no unreasonable suppositions, is all that is needed to reconcile miraculous effects of prayer to the government of the world by unalterable general laws. It does not require us to ascribe to matter or to mind any forces except such as experience proves them to possess, because, as I said, the phenomena which result from the relation of matter and mind in our own persons show them to possess properties by which they are enabled to exert an influence upon each other. In requiring the existence of an unknown law by which their mutual action may be regulated, it only requires us to presume the existence of what the same phenomena prove to exist. For according to any intelligible meaning of law it is the same thing in the works of God, to show the existence of a force and to show that a law must exist whether we can discover it or not. To suppose that this is only a more general law than we have discovered, or than any that observation upon either class of existences separately could reveal to us—to suppose that it is only a more general law comprehending these separated laws—seems more philosophical than to suppose it a third law distinct from the known laws of matter and the similar but less known laws

of mind. But if it be admitted to be real it is all that is absolutely necessary to our purpose. This obviously applies alike to the difficulties connected with the extraordinary and the ordinary effects of prayer, though it is only the former which oblige us to resort to this solution of them. I think I have done enough to show its reasonableness upon the former days on which I spoke, and I do not return to it to obviate any fresh difficulties which may be raised against it by those who hold the objections which it was designed to remove. But I believe I have now to say something to reconcile a very different class of persons to it.

Some who believe firmly in the efficacy of prayer upon the simple declarations and promises of the Word of God, may be inclined to apprehend that attempts like this to prove its reasonableness are likely to derogate from the absolute authority of His Word, and that this may seem to be recognising man's right to expect a demonstration of the reasonableness of all that he is required to believe before he will believe it. And those who do not think the attempt to remove such objections liable to such censure, may still reject the way of reconciling them that I have taken, as ending in an unscriptural representation of our relation to God; and putting us further from Him in our conceptions and feelings in this very act in which we are emphatically expected to draw nigh to Him than is compatible with any profitable exercise of this important duty. I feel that the course which I have

taken may appear open to both these objections, and I am anxious to say a word to remove them. As to the general objection I need say but little. I am quite sure that the expectation that we shall be able to demonstrate to men the reasonableness of all that God in His Word requires them to believe would be a very delusive one, and that any course which was fitted to encourage men to make such a demand would be very justly censurable as misleading them with respect to their true relation to God. No one who only believes God's Word where he can see that it is reasonable, can in any proper sense be regarded as a believer however much he may believe. But when objections are urged to unsettle the faith of the believer, or to impede the convictions of the enquirer, or even to confirm the disbelief of the infidel—by representing the unreasonableness of what we are required to believe, it cannot be wrong to show the groundlessness of the imputation. We may be sure that we are not detracting from the authority of the Word of God or conceding too much to human reason when we make such an attempt to convert reason into an auxiliary, or to weaken or overthrow its opposition. We are only adopting a course which is often pursued in the Word of God itself, in which tender consideration for the frailty of man is so graciously reconciled with the reverence which we owe to the authority of God.

It would doubtless be a more perfectly healthy state of mind which would leave us independent

of all such aids, but the Word of God does not propose only to deal with minds the best disciplined and regulated, in which all the principles of subordination are most fully established. It addresses those in which conscience is enfeebled, and the love of God extinct, and even in what it says to those in whom these higher principles have acquired some strength, it exercises a tender consideration for the frailty which makes us liable to be agitated by such doubts and makes ample provisions to supply it with the safeguards from such assaults which it needs.

No one can forget all the persuasive reasonings by which the Lord commends to the understanding of His hearers almost every doctrine and almost every precept that He proposes. And St. Paul's writings so abound with the use of reasoning to explain, enforce, and commend what was given by Divine inspiration, and what therefore comes to us with Divine authority, as, I think, to form a full justification of the employment of it, when any part of Divine truth is assailed. The scruple seems indeed to have been raised in forgetfulness of the nature of revealed religion, as well as of the mode in which it has been propounded to us. It is so accordant indeed with the whole genius of Christianity, as well as with the course taken by its inspired teachers, to employ reasoning in enforcing or vindicating any parts of Divine truth, which is either resisted or assailed, that if there be any just objections against the attempt in the

present case, they must be not against the design but against the mode of executing it. I shall assume that enough has been said to justify the attempt, to satisfy such difficulties as I have been answering, and shall proceed to consider what may be said against the solution of them which I have offered.

I know that there are some to whom the explanation will appear, as I said, unscriptural in itself, and most injurious in its tendency. I think the former apprehension is from a mistake of its real nature, and the latter from a mistake of its proper use. And as I am anxious that its true nature, and its true use should be distinctly understood,—and indeed as it is through this desire chiefly that I have been led to resume the subject —I shall spend a little time to put the matter in its proper light.

I may remark with the view of having the case clearly apprehended, that if all that were meant by the charge of being unscriptural were, that it cannot be found in Scripture or proved by Scripture, I should not feel concerned in denying it. The solution is professedly hypothetical and it is not necessary for its purpose to prove it true. It is enough if it be possible. The objection against the efficacy of prayer with which we were dealing, is that it cannot be efficacious consistently with what we know with certainty of the established constitution of nature. It is evidently quite sufficient, if in reply to this we can show any way

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in which prayer may be efficacious in accordance with this constitution. It is to mistake the purpose of such solutions, to require that the way should be actually the one in which prayer is accomplished. It is quite enough if it be one in which prayer may be accomplished. It shows us that the objection which asserts that there is no such way is certainly unfounded. To show that there is, is to deprive the objection of all force. And indeed I add that not only is it unnecessary that for this purpose the solution should be capable of being proved true; but that it may answer this purpose even though we should have very strong reason to believe it false. Because, if it be a possible mode of reconciling the efficacy of prayer with the constitution and government of the world, it is enough to satisfy the objector that he was in error, in maintaining that there was no such mode. And even if he find reason to doubt afterwards that this is the actual mode, still it may serve the purpose of securing him from relying upon the objection — the solution is still good ground for apprehending that there may be some true mode of reconciling the things which he regarded it impossible to reconcile, and it is a satisfactory proof that the reasoning, whatever it be, by which he has been led to conclude against its possibility is erroneous.

I am not concerned then to deny the charge that the solution is unscriptural in this sense of unscriptural. But the objection is likely to be

often made in another sense in which I am. It is likely to be apprehended that Scripture discountenances, or rejects absolutely the view of the connection of the visible and unseen worlds on which the solution is founded. And I am naturally anxious to clear up this point. It would be a fact, as fatal to the solution that I have offered, that it should be opposed to what Scripture teaches us of the constitution of the world, and of the government of God, as that it should be opposed to any information upon the same points which we receive from experience and reason. But there is this further motive for desiring to answer the objection: that I am sure it springs from prejudices which shut us out from such views of the unseen world as are fitted to comfort and to strengthen us by giving such consistency to our apprehensions of the unseen as may lend added stability to our hopes of the future.

Closely as we are now connected with it, and although we are so soon to form a part of it, the spiritual world is a subject which was evidently intended to be a dark one to us, but it was not intended to be wholly hidden from our view. Though it was not to be so unveiled as to fill our imaginations and engage our thoughts to an extent inconsistent with our nearer concerns in the world of sense, yet some glimpses were intended to be afforded to us, such as might seem to aid in some measure in disengaging us from too engrossing an interest in the world that surrounds us and acts

upon our senses—so much is made known to us as may serve in some measure to help us in the Christian struggle to walk by faith—by enabling imagination to serve us as an antagonistic power to sense. So that we are as much counteracting the designs of God when we shut ourselves out from any knowledge concerning the future and the unseen which He places within our reach in His word, as when we vainly struggle for what He intended to place beyond us. We are deeply interested in keeping this, at best, rather dark subject as clear as He has left it. And there is one prejudice which, I think, casts needless obscurity upon it—the impression, I mean, which we so habitually entertain that the whole economy of the unseen world is different from that which the visible and material world offers to us; and, in particular, that the use of means ceases and that all is brought about by the immediate exertion of the Divine Power. In such a view of God's designs for His creation—a view which would consign for ever to inaction the glorious company of angels and the spirits of just men made perfect —which would render the gift of their energies so purposeless, and all the discipline of this life by which we seem to be prepared for loftier exertion in a wider sphere so unintelligible—it would seem impossible that any one who exercised his unfettered reason upon the case should acquiesce. And it certainly is as decisively discountenanced by the Word of God as by Reason. All that we

are allowed to see of the world of spirit would present it to us as in this respect perfectly like the world of matter, and lead us to believe that there is the same employment of means there as here, though the means be different. But all that is brought about there is through the instrumentality of spiritual agents—of angels who are ministers of His, that do His pleasure, who are represented as accomplishing the Will of God while similar beings, or beings of the like nature and powers, are engaged in the vain endeavour of opposing His will and defeating His designs. This is made known to us not only by general declarations of such an economy, but by exhibiting to us distinct instances of it in action. Thus we are not merely told of the interest which they take in the wondrous scheme of man's redemption, but their agency in promoting it is on some occasions distinctly shown to us. We are not merely told that they are ministering spirits sent to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation, but we are allowed to see them engaged at times in their gracious ministrations.

An angel, one who stands in the Presence of God, is sent long before to inform Daniel when the mighty Deliverer should appear, and when the time drew nigh we find the same spirit employed in the grateful task of announcing the birth of the Lord's forerunner and His own. Angels hail His birth in songs of praise which we seem to be told are only the echo of the hymns of joy with

which the wonder is celebrated in the highest heavens. We are allowed to see them afterwards from time to time serving Him in His humiliation whom in His exaltation they adore. We see them watching over Him in the dangers to which He was exposed in His childhood from His mortal foes; ministering to Him after His conflict with His spiritual enemy, and when His last sufferings were approaching strengthening Him in His agony. When He is risen angels are at His tomb to announce the glad tidings to His sorrowing disciples, and when at last He ascends where He was before, angels remain behind to comfort and to counsel them. After He is gone we see them from time to time protecting, directing and aiding those whom He had left to found and to advance His Kingdom. We see an angel standing by Paul at night to enlighten and comfort and support him; and when the door is to be thrown open to the heathen it is through the ministrations of an angel that the pious centurion is directed so to seek light for himself that all that sat in the same darkness might profit too, and that Christ might be a light to lighten the Gentiles. And we are not only allowed to see these spiritual agents ushering in this dispensation of mercy and aiding its progress, but we are expressly told what shall be their share in its consummation:—that when the Lord shall be revealed from heaven to judge the world—to reward and to avenge—when He shall come in the glory of His Father, God's holy angels shall come

with Him, and that He shall send forth His angels and they shall gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire—there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But, what I am more concerned to notice—we see that their agency is employed not only in grace but in providence. Or to avoid all verbal ambiguities, we see that it goes beyond the work of supplying knowledge or comfort, or strength to His people, or ministering in any way to their spiritual necessities by the exertion of powers which we esteem properly spiritual—that they are employed to perform good offices which require an exertion of those energies of which I before spoke, which enable them to act upon matter. Indeed here the express testimony of the Word of God goes beyond, instead of falling short of the inference which we draw from experience. We inferred, you remember, from what we experience in our own persons, that spirit possesses naturally a power of moving matter, and that therefore it might be a part of the arrangements of God's government that intermediate spirits should sometimes exert this power in our material world, so as to produce effects which are ordinarily brought about by mechanical or other material forces. The possibility of this was clear, and was quite sufficient for my purpose. But the Bible converts this possibility into certainty. It shows us angels actually employed in such offices, and at times relates their agency in

terms so express as to preclude the possibility of resolving the account into figurative language. We are expressly told not only that when God was displeased with Balaam, the angel of the Lord stood in his way for an adversary against him, and that the ass saw him, which might, in the way of dealing with such passages that is so often adopted, admit of being resolved into a figure—but we are told that the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, so that he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way and his sword drawn in his hand,—and we are told that the angel of the Lord spoke to him, and he to the angel. Again when David's folly in numbering the people caused a pestilence to fall upon Israel, we are told that the Lord sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it—which, as before, might be taken not to be a literal explanation of the cause of the destruction which was wrought, but a figurative description of what is literally expressed as a pestilence. But, as before, such an interpretation is precluded by the additional information that David lifted up his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem, and that Ornan the Jebusite, by whose threshing-floor he stood, saw him too.

Do not such explicit additions do more than render it impossible to interpret figuratively the particular narratives to which they are appended? do they not render it most unreasonable so to

interpret similar narratives which are given without such additions, as for example that awful account of the destruction wrought in the Assyrian camp: "And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred and four-score and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses." No explanation is added here to exclude a figurative interpretation of the passage. But are we not, here and elsewhere, sufficiently guarded against such an erroneous interpretation by such instances as I have given you?

I need hardly refer you to all the similar cases in the New Testament which reject no less decisively a figurative interpretation. It is not more emphatically told us, for example, that Joseph of Arimathea rolled a great stone to the sepulchre of our Lord, than that it was rolled away by an angel. "The angel of the Lord," St. Matthew tells us, "descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon it." And he then goes on to describe his appearance, and the terror which filled the hearts of the keepers at the sight of him, and the words which he spoke to the women. Again, read the account in the Acts of the Apostles of the angel of the Lord opening the prison door by night, for the deliverance of John and Peter, and his bringing them forth and commanding them what to do. Or read the more circumstantial account of Peter's

deliverance when he was cast into prison by Herod. Anyone who can read all the minute details in this last narrative of the proceedings and the language of the angel, and believe that it is a figurative account of a deliverance effected by the direct exertion of God's power, and without the intervention of any finite spirit, must be possessed of principles of interpretation which would enable him to convert any history in the world into an allegory.

Here are the clearest examples, then, of the employment of angels to execute the will of God in sending deliverance, and in inflicting judgment. And I cannot myself but regard it as more reasonable to suppose, that these cases were not distinguished from others in which wondrous works were wrought in this, that a different agency was employed in them, but merely in this, that the agency which is always employed in such cases was in these, for special purposes, made visible. When we read in the Psalms that the Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him and delivereth them, we might be disposed to receive it as a figurative declaration of the care which God exerts over His people; and even those who were disposed to receive literally the statement of the means by which He exercises this care would be inclined, probably, to confine the agency of the angels to warding off spiritual dangers, and repelling the assaults of our spiritual foes. But how far this would be falling short of the true meaning of the promise we are taught by that beautiful

incident in the life of Elisha, in which, when a host compassed the city of Dothan both with chariots and horses, and to human eyes his destruction appeared certain, God was pleased in answer to Elisha's prayer to disclose to His trembling servant the provision made for their security: "And Elisha prayed and said, Lord, I pray Thee open his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." These spiritual combatants were already there when Elisha prayed—and Elisha knew it, and his prayer was, not that God would send their aid, but that He would enable His servant to see the aid which He had already provided. Shall we not take this as conclusive evidence that God's angels encamp around the righteous to defend them from earthly as well as from spiritual foes? Or shall we rather think that this was a pageant, or that it was only for the particular occasion, or on behalf of this particular saint?

It is very evident, I think, that the use by Satan of the promise "He shall give His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways: they shall bear thee up in their hands lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone," *i.e.* his literal application of this promise, warrants the same conclusion.

I will not stop to prove this, but will rather direct your attention to the Lord's own language when

in the hands of His human enemies, and when His too ardent followers had made an untimely effort to set Him free by violence, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?"

Does not this language lead irresistibly to the same conclusion? Is it not reasonable to believe that the peculiarity in Christ's case was not that a strange agency would have been employed in His deliverance, but that the forces which were ordinarily employed to effect such ends were all ready to be given at once in answer to His prayer? I mean, would it not be reasonable so to view the case if it stood alone? But is it possible to view it in any other way, after we have seen such examples of the actual employment by God of these spiritual forces for the defence of His people from bodily hurt, and for their deliverance from their mortal foes? Does not the Lord's language, then, evidently refer to this arrangement of the Divine government? Does it not naturally spring from a familiarity with such an arrangement?

And finally, I would ask, does not this appear to be the judgment of our own Church? Upon this, as upon all such subjects, she maintains a wise and scriptural forbearance, but she does not leave us in any doubt of what her decision is. Does she not ascribe to angels the office of protecting us from bodily no less than from ghostly dangers in that

solemn prayer with which I shall for the present conclude :—

O Almighty God, who hast ordained and constituted the services of angels and men in a wonderful order : mercifully grant, that as Thy Holy Angels alway do Thee service in heaven, so by Thy appointment they may succour and defend us on earth : through Jesus Christ our Lord.

IV.

But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day.—Matt. xxiv. 20.

In considering in connection with this text some objections to the efficacy of prayer, we found it necessary to dwell most upon those which are founded upon the constitution of the visible world, and its government according to general laws. And I showed you, that in the case in which the objects of prayer are most important, and in which we are most interested to be assured of its efficacy, these objections raise no difficulty: that in fact they do not apply to anything which Scripture reveals concerning the operations of the Infinite Spirit upon our minds—or to any of their effects—or to any thing which the same word teaches of the influence of prayer upon these operations. And as to the case to which they do apply, I showed you that the supposition of spiritual agency—of the agency of the Infinite Spirit and of finite spirits—supplies the means of a satisfactory solution of them all. I

showed you, in fact, that the action of spirit upon spirit is sufficient to account for all the supposed effects of prayer which do not require a suspension or contravention of the laws which we know of nature; and that all which do, may be accounted for by the action of spirit upon matter. I had shown you upon former days that the solution of these common objections which we thus obtain is a sufficient one, even upon the principles of the objectors. But something more is necessary to justify the use of it, even in argument with others. And I attempted upon the last day to show you that there is nothing in it which forbids the employment of it for such a purpose; that whether true or not, it is neither chimerical nor unscriptural, that it does not presume anything concerning the world of spirits, or its relation to the world of sense, which is negatived or discountenanced by experience or reason, or the Word of God. On the contrary, indeed, that experience of the action of mind upon matter in our own persons proves to us that intermediate spirits must naturally possess the powers which this solution supposes them to possess: and that reason suggests very forcibly that the powers which they naturally possess it must be intended they should sometimes exercise. And finally, we found in the Old and in the New Testament evidence the most conclusive of the actual employment of intermediate spirits as the ministers of God's wrath and of His mercy, in offices which required them not merely to exercise upon mind those moral powers

which we are accustomed to regard as the only power which they possess, but to exert upon body those energies by which they can produce all the effects of mechanical and other material forces.

Of the exercise of such powers for the succour and defence of God's people, and for the infliction of vengeance upon His enemies, I gave some clear examples from Holy Scripture. They could have been very easily multiplied by resorting more to the prophecies, and especially to the Apocalypse. But if I had drawn my testimonies from this source, there would have been a pretext for a figurative interpretation of the passages, which will scarcely, I suppose, be thought reasonable in the case of those actually brought forward. They were numerous enough for my purpose; and some of them not only put the reality of this agency beyond a doubt, and exhibited distinctly its nature, but seemed most naturally to lead to the conclusion that it was one constantly exerted—that it was according to a fixed part of the Divine economy that these beings were employed in the offices of judgment and mercy in which we saw them engaged. This was, as I showed you, the conclusion to which some remarkable passages of Holy Writ, which I quoted, obviously led. And indeed, independently of their authority, I think it is the conclusion which we would naturally draw from the simplest of these examples of the exercise of such powers. When once we see that it is consistent with God's government of our world, to employ

the agency of those ministers of His who do His pleasure upon such occasions, and when we know that similar occasions are perpetually arising, it seems most natural to treat these instances as glimpses afforded to us of what is continually going on. It is just as in the Old Testament we see from time to time God's hand revealed, controlling, over-ruling, and directing the agencies by which important events are brought about. I suppose many persons feel it to be reasonable to regard such passages, not as showing unconnected, exceptional instances of Divine interference, but rather as a momentary raising of the curtain which conceals the world of spirits from our sight, disclosing to our view what is behind it—what is strange and unusual not being that which is disclosed, but the fact of its disclosure to us. This seems to accord best with the regularity of God's government in general; and it is strongly borne out by the analogy which is supplied by the mode in which the Bible presents to us the same agency in grace. For no one imagines that the few cases in which we are allowed to see angels imparting knowledge or comfort or strength to God's saints, are the only ones in which they perform such gracious offices; everyone must know that they are only *examples* of the way in which these ministering spirits minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation—examples serving the use which all visible exhibitions of important truths serve, of bringing them more vividly before us, and imprinting them more

deeply upon us, and conveying to us many particulars which no abstract enunciations of them can be made to convey. This is the way in which everyone receives the instances which the Bible records of the ministrations of those spirits in grace. And if the analogy would not warrant us in concluding that the same is true in providence, it at least must be felt to be a very powerful confirmation of the conclusion derived from other considerations.

I need say no more to show, that, in supposing the existence of such an agency in providence as well as in grace, I was making no supposition which is discountenanced by the testimony of God's Word. And still less need be said in justification of the part of the supposition which places this agency at the command of prayer. Reason can find no difficulty in a supposition which makes the exercise of any powers of moral and intellectual agents depend upon this or any such moral force; and there seems to be no pretext for regarding it as in any way opposed to what we are taught in Holy Writ. Indeed, in some of the Scriptural instances of the exercise of this agency which we were looking at on the last day, the connection is so distinctly exhibited as to take away all grounds of difficulty upon that part of the supposition. Thus it is when David and the elders of Israel, clothed in sackcloth, fall upon their faces before God, and David prays earnestly to the Lord, that the angel of the Lord commands Gad the prophet

to point out to David the course by which the visitation from which the nation was suffering might be put an end to—to tell him to go up, and to set up an altar unto the Lord in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite. And it is when he obeys the command and builds an altar to the Lord, and offers burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, and *calls upon the name of the Lord*, that we are told that the Lord answered him by fire upon the altar of burnt-offering: "And the Lord commanded the angel, and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof" (1 Chron. xxi.) In the course of the same history we are told how Jerusalem was delivered from the destruction with which it was threatened by the host of Sennacherib through the ministration of an angel. But it is when Hezekiah the king and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amos *pray and cry to heaven*, that the Lord sends the angel which cut off all the mighty men of valour and the leaders and captains, in the camp of the king of Assyria.

When Gabriel came to enlighten Daniel concerning the great deliverance which God had in store for His people it is, we are told, when he was engaged in humble confession of his guilt, and in earnest supplication to God to put it away, and to accomplish according to His promise that deliverance from captivity by which the great deliverance was so strikingly typified. Indeed, Daniel's own account exhibits the connection as distinctly, and even as minutely, as if it had no other design

than to make it known (Dan. ix. 20). "And whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God; yea, *whiles I was speaking in prayer*, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, 'O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee.'" It is in the same way in answer to prayer that Gabriel again comes to Zacharias with nearer intelligence of the same great event. It is while Cornelius is fasting and praying that the angel stands before him. When we are told of the deliverance of Peter from prison by an angel, we are first told that prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him; and, finally, it was while the Lord Himself was on His knees praying that there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And you cannot fail to remember how clearly the connection is indicated in the rebuke of Peter's forwardness in His defence which on the last day we found threw so much light upon the nature of this agency: "Thinkest thou that I cannot now *pray* to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels?"

It will, I suppose, be felt that such references to the Sacred Scriptures are sufficient to guard both parts of the supposition I have made from the imputation of being contrary to what Scripture teaches concerning the nature of the agency through which events are brought about in providence and grace, or concerning its dependence upon prayer. The passages not only show that various blessings, spiritual and temporal, are bestowed in answer to prayer through the instrumentality of angels, but examples of these are supplied which are abundantly sufficient to show the nature, and to intimate the extent, of this agency. And when we add the fair force of such examples to the express testimony of the Word of God concerning the influences of the Holy Spirit, and the mode of procuring and increasing them, we must see that spiritual agency is adequate to bring about every thing which we seek, or can seek, in prayer.

But though so far Holy Scripture lends the supposition all the support that can be desired, it may be thought that it wears an unfavourable aspect towards the remaining part—that it is so far from presenting effects as brought about under any such general law as we have so often spoken of—that it on the contrary ascribes every exertion of this angelic agency to the direct command of God, so that while the Word of God establishes for us the existence of this agency, and shows that it is employed in answer to prayer, it seems to forbid such a use of it as we have been making. Our use of it

against the objectors seems to require that it should be regulated by a general law; but when we turn to the Bible for support, it appears to establish that it is by no general law, but by the good pleasure of God made known to the agent upon each occasion on which He is to interfere.

I am sure it would never be worth while engaging you in the considerations which are necessary for perfectly clearing up this difficulty, if the only object were to free this supposition from prejudice; but I hope the trouble will put the whole question in so much clearer light as to appear in the end well expended.

In the first place, then, I may say, that if Scripture obliged us to believe that the occasions on which angels interfere in the concerns of our lower world are always determined by direct Divine command, this would not hinder the supposition of such spiritual agency from being employed legitimately for the purpose for which I have employed it. The objection with which I am dealing is that the efficacy of prayer is inconsistent with what experience tells us of the constitution of the world and its government;—that it supposes matter to be endowed with properties different from those which experience proves it to possess, and supposes the operation of those properties which experience proves matter to possess—altered: and that so the laws of nature, the immutability of which is a first principle, are changed and suspended.

It is sufficient to reply to this, that it does

not require any of the permanent properties of bodies altered, or any of the laws which regulate their operation changed;—or that matter does anything, or suffers anything, except what experience shows it to be capable of doing and suffering.

For that every hour's experience of ourselves shows us that body has properties by which it is capable of being acted upon by spirit, and that spirit possesses properties by which it is enabled to exert force upon body—to produce motion, and all the effects which follow from it; that if therefore we admit the existence of intermediate spirits, we must admit that there are, in nature, forces by which all the supposed effects of prayer may be brought about. There must be some general law, of course, determining what effects body may suffer, and what effects spirit can produce. This is the only law which it is essential should exist and be observed in the operation; essential, I mean, for the purposes of meeting the objection. But if this law be not violated in bringing about the accomplishment of prayer through the instrumentality of angels, and it is evident that there is no pretext for alleging that it is—then the objection, that the efficacy of prayer presumes the mutability of the forces, or the laws with which experience makes us acquainted, is evidently unfounded. For experience, as I have shown, makes known to us the existence of this force; and of course the existence of some law to

regulate its action, no less certainly than it does the existence of any material force the laws of which we have determined. The question how the occasions of such interferences are determined is evidently of no concern in the case, except that we may be assured that this secret agency shall not be exerted in such ways and degrees as would render the operation of material forces uncertain in ordinary cases, and so deprive us of the rule of life, and all the advantages, physical and moral, which the regularity of nature's course was intended to bestow upon us. But it is evident that this end would be as well secured under the supposition that all occasions of the interference of these beings were regulated by the direct exercise of the will of the Author of these laws of nature, as by the supposition that there is an established law to determine, not the limits of their power only, but the occasions on which it is to be exerted. There is nothing then, you will remember, in the purpose of answering the objection that requires that we should make the latter supposition rather than the former.

But it may be asked, What advantage is there got by this solution? Would not the objectors be as ready to believe that the forces of matter are altered, or their natural operation suspended, by a direct exertion of the Will of God in answer to prayer, as by an exertion of the power of intermediate spirits, whose agency upon each occasion results from a direct exertion of God's Will?

I answer perhaps they would; but the object in the proposed solution is not to supply what the objectors will be disposed easily to believe, but what they cannot easily reject upon their own principles. Now for this it is quite enough to show, that the Scripture promises to prayer, even when they take the widest range, and engage that, in answer to the prayer of faith, a mountain should be plucked up by the roots and cast into the sea—presume no effects except such as may be brought about by forces of which experience establishes the existence.

But then I must add, that I do not think the language of Scripture obliges us to adopt this supposition. The holy Scriptures are written throughout under a deep impression of the momentous truth, that the Most High doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of earth, and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him 'what doest Thou'—that all creation, animate and inanimate, rational and irrational, corporeal and incorporeal, are promoting His will, whether consciously or unconsciously, with the concurrence or opposition of their own wills—the Bible not only recognizes the actual agency of these individual existences in bringing about events, but recognizes distinctly all the intellectual and moral principles which can make us responsible for our share in the production of them. But the supremacy of the great author of all is so felt that He is often presented to us, not merely as

the true cause of what happens, but as the immediate and sole agent, so that in the description, all that is intermediate is altogether lost, or only preserved in a way fitted to conceal all that natural course of voluntary conduct, through which the purposes of God are accomplished. And so events are presented to us in their ultimate dependence upon His will, without noticing their immediate dependence upon the wills of His creatures, or noticing it at times in such a way as would make it appear that His will was the motive under which an agent acted, who perhaps thought not of the will of God at all in the case, or thought of it only to desire to frustrate it. I need not give examples of such language, as it pervades the whole Bible. But in illustration of the phraseology for which I have more particularly to account, I may say that it is employed under this view of the relation of the whole universe to God. All things that exist being regarded as ministering to God's pleasure, and moved only by His will—are described as acting by His *commands*. And it is in the same way that events which result from God's providential arrangements, but which are brought about by the forces of lifeless matter, or the instincts of brute natures, or the voluntary efforts of intelligent beings, acting under ordinary motives, are all described as resulting from his command. It is thus that the course of nature regular and irregular is spoken of. He sendeth forth His

commandment upon earth, His word runneth very swiftly, He giveth snow like wool, He scattereth the hoar-frost like ashes, &c., &c., and so on through all the vicissitudes of the seasons. He covereth the light, and commandeth it not to shine. He commandeth and raiseth the stormy wind which lifteth up the waves of the sea. And in the same way the instruments of vengeance against his people, even when they were inanimate or irrational, are all spoken of as performing their office by His *command.* "And though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them. And though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them."

In the same way afflictions and blessings which come to us through our fellow-men, acting by God's appointment, are said to come to us by God's *command;* though the agents have received no commandment from Him, and are acting freely and apparently under the influence of ordinary motives. So in Jeremiah God threatens the return of the Chaldean Army to the city which He had devoted to destruction. "'Behold I will *command,*' saith the Lord, 'and cause them to return to this city, and they shall fight against it, and take it, and burn it with fire.'"

And in the same way He promises support to His servant Elijah. "Arise, get thee to Zarephath which belongeth to Zidon and dwell there; behold I have

commanded a widow woman to sustain thee," when the progress of the story shows us that no such preparation was made for his reception as the word *command* would lead those unacquainted with Scripture language to expect. Indeed, so familiar to the sacred writers is the conception of God as a supreme ruler issuing resistless commands, that we find the phraseology preserved when no subjects of the command are expressed, and when the circumstances of the case do not easily supply any. As in the case of the bringing to naught the counsel of Ahitophel. "And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, 'the counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahitophel.'" "For the Lord" (it is added) "appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahitophel to the intent that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom." Where the word rendered by our translators *appointed* is in the original *commanded.* I need not add to these instances to show how widely the use of such language extends, and how little we should have a right to conclude absolutely from finding the same language employed with respect to spiritual agents, that their acts therefore are the result of a direct *command* of God. If the economy of the unseen world were like that of the visible world; if exerting powers bestowed upon them by God, and living under laws of His appointment, and acting under His supreme direction, all spiritual existences were promoting His designs, evil spirits by constraint and good spirits willingly, it would appear that it was

perfectly accordant with the language of Holy Scripture that any act of either class of existence should be spoken of, as by His *command*. But at least the instances which I have given would show how likely such language was to be employed concerning the acts of those angels who do His pleasure, whose will is entirely conformed to His, and who are always consciously promoting His designs—whether these acts are really performed in obedience to His direct command or in obedience to general laws which He has given for their government, and which are applied by them to the circumstances of the particular case as His word is, by the human agents who desire to conform their conduct to His will. Whichever be the system under which they are living, the language in question would be equally likely to be employed, and its use therefore furnishes no means of determining which scheme of government actually prevails in the unseen world. But the latter seems on other grounds far the more likely mode of governing intelligent and moral agents—that whatever be the mode of declaring His will, their conduct is the result of an intelligent application to circumstances of some general principles of action, rather than prescribed by specific directions upon every occasion as it offers itself, appears far the more probable hypothesis. It would be so indeed if the whole world of spirits offered nothing but harmony and obedience. But we cannot consider the conflict which is going on there without seeing that it greatly adds to the

probability. We know that beings of the angelic nature are unceasingly exercising all their craft, and all their powers to frustrate all God's designs, and specially these very plans which we know that His angels are employed to promote;—that while they are ministering spirits, sent to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation, Satan and his angels are tempting, deluding, and accusing them; and to the utmost of their power afflicting them—It would be hardly possible to believe that such a strife of contending hosts should be going on continuously without laws to regulate the mode of conducting the conflict, to limit the nature and extent of the aid to be imparted by the friendly powers, as well as of the seductions to be employed or the injury inflicted by our foes—so to proportion the forces on both sides to the moral state and the circumstances of the subject of the contest as may leave him in the condition which suits God's plans for his probation or his discipline. That such a conflict should be going on, and by such means, seems plainly to require the existence of certain rules and principles to regulate the application of the forces at the command of all these agents—laws which of course leave room for the exercise of powers which these beings possess but so regulating the use of their service as to determine the multiplied cases which in the course of such a contest must arise at every moment. And even if there were no other source of them than the one first indicated, that is if, as seems most reasonable, it be

the moral condition of all, both believers and unbelievers, which is to regulate the forces to be employed in sustaining and assailing them; their conduct and character and even their internal state might be at every moment to be discussed and litigated. Few and dark as the passages of Holy Writ are which refer to the mode of conducting this conflict, they, I think, fall in with this conception of it; the Accuser of the brethren who accused them before God day and night on the one hand; and on the other, Michael and those angels which excel in power and might maintaining the conflict but not provoked by his rage to return his reviling, leaving the final decision to the Lord—Such a scene I say accords much better with a state of things in which the condition of individuals was to be litigated and fixed according to general laws, appealed to by both parties, than with one in which the part of the ministering and the accusing spirit was determined in every instance by a special command from God. All this will appear very startling to some. And no doubt to find the being who is cast out from God's presence and who concentrates in himself all that God abhors and cannot behold, in this character of an accuser of others, urging against the victims of his malice the guilt into which he has himself betrayed them, and demanding to have them given over to his power finally or for a season, is likely to startle many who yet believe firmly in the existence of the great conflict of which I have been speaking, and to a great extent in the means by

which I have described it, as carried on. It is no doubt strange, and at war with all our first conceptions, but it is only through want of due consideration that it startles us so violently at this stage of our belief. A little consideration would show us that what is most startling in it, is involved in the conception of such a conflict. The existence of such a conflict not only presumes a limited and regulated exercise of the infinite power against which it is carried on, but it implies that the Being who is permitted to wage it, is invested with rights which are to be preserved and which may be to be vindicated—From this, everything else follows with ease. Intimations of such a state of things are I think perpetually appearing in the New Testament—that is, the supposition explains many mysterious passages—And does not this state of things appear most unequivocally in a most awful shape in the Lord's solemn communication to Peter that *Satan had demanded to have the Apostle given over to him* for a severe trial, and that it was by His prayer that Peter himself was preserved from suffering in the trial something yet worse than the sad downfall that his pride and self-dependence were preparing for him—And the Lord said "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath DESIRED to have you that he may sift you as wheat." You will see that in the original it is, "hath *demanded*" or "*required* that he should have you. But I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not. And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

Is not Samuel's question to Saul most easily understood upon such a supposition? Does not the impatience of the question "Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up?" agree much better with the notion of a spirit appearing against his inclination from his own judgment of what the circumstances rendered right and therefore necessary, than of one sent by an express command from God?

Again, does not this relation of evil spirits to the moral forces which may be employed to move or restrain them, appear not only in the Lord's casting out the evil spirit which His disciples could not cast out, but—His explanation of their failure—that the spirit was of that kind which goeth not out but by prayer and fasting—does not this accord best with the supposition of such a law as I have spoken of, regulating the effect to be produced *on* such beings as well as *by* them—and under which a spirit of this kind was enabled to resist all the forces which the Apostles were able to bring against him, to which other spirits so promptly yielded—and yet was constrained at once to give way to the greater power with which the command of Christ was armed?

But I believe I have already said more than enough to prove that the supposition is open to no charge of giving a view of this part of the divine economy in any way opposed to the representations of the Holy Scriptures. I have indeed, gone willingly beyond the purpose of vindicating the

supposition which I made from this charge, and though I have not lost sight of this object in looking for the Scripture testimony of the nature and extent of the ministry of angels in our lower sphere, yet I have opened out the testimony of the Bible much further than this limited object required. I have thus dwelt upon the inquiry not merely for the interest of the results to which it leads, or even for the practical advantages which, as I explained on the last day, may be derived from them. But in addition, because the subject belongs to a class upon which there has often been exhibited a kind of timidity which is vicious in its principle, and most injurious in its effects. All the gross and pernicious superstitions, which have been grafted upon the truths of religion, have always been producing this twofold evil. In addition to their debasing effects upon the minds of those who embrace them, they have a tendency to dispose those who reject them, to view the truths with which they are connected with hostility or alarm, so that sometimes the erroneous doctrine has been rejected in the gross as altogether erroneous, and sometimes when it has been perceived that it was founded upon some Scripture truth, men have shrunk from any inquiry as to what the amount or nature of the truth was, under a notion that it was safer wholly to let alone what had been proved to be so dangerous. And so, clear Scriptural truths have either been directly denied, or virtually cast out of our creed. Thus how often have the work

of the Spirit, and the holiness of life and heart and conversation, which are so essential a part of the blessings of the Gospel, been treated slightly and insufficiently, because the Church of Rome, and they who symbolize with her in the Article of Justification, give a place to good works in that doctrine which is subversive of all true religion! Because the doctrine of rewards is stated so as to contradict the same vital truth, and to minister to self-righteousness and pride—the notion of reward has been abjured and the very word almost obliterated from the language of religion. And finally, because the Church of Rome has taught purgatory, the existence of an intermediate state of disembodied spirits has been denied, and because she has taught false doctrines concerning the state and offices of departed saints and founded the grossest superstitions upon the falsehood; Protestants have often shunned the inquiry into what the Holy Scriptures teach concerning the relation of angels to us and to the material world.

Such a presumptuous and unfaithful course cannot but be productive of most injurious effects both to ourselves and others. Whilst it keeps us ignorant of wholesome truth, it is fitted to confirm our opponents in the deadliest error. Indeed, I know nothing more calculated to strengthen a man's convictions of some truth about which he was beginning to waver, than seeing that those who reject it are led to reject something which he knows to be true, or that those who assail it find

themselves obliged to deny something which he sees clearly set forth in the Word of God. But independently of its confirming others in their errors, and of its shutting us out from truth which God's wisdom has provided for us, it is founded upon a vicious principle which is itself almost worse than any of its worst results. It is founded upon the principle, that we can judge better than God what is useful and safe for us—it is venturing to pronounce that the truth which He has given in His Word either is of no value, or of no value which would outweigh the dangers which it brings; or worse: which would compensate for the labour by which such hazards are to be guarded against.

I should not know how to set the presumption of such a principle in a stronger light than it appears in the simplest statement of it, and it is needless to make the attempt, for however often it be acted upon no one would, I presume, be prepared to avow or defend it. And it is hardly necessary to say, that the dangers which we apprehend in such cases, either vanish upon a nearer examination of the particular truth, or find in other parts of the same word appropriate and most sufficient safeguards. This is only what we should confidently presume from the wisdom of the Author of the Sacred Scriptures—even if we were unable to see it distinctly. But we often are, and it may be useful to show that we are in the particular case which has led us to speak upon the subject, and that to the patient and humble reader of God's

Word the truth which he will find there brings no dangers, while it is fitted to enlarge his apprehensions of the wide extent of the creation of God, of the intimate connection of its remotest parts, and of the subservience of all to the great work of Redemption in which all His perfections are shown.

But this would require more time than we could bestow upon it. And this, with whatever else remains to complete our limited consideration of the extensive subject of prayer, I must reserve for some future opportunity of addressing you.

V.

But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day.—MATT. xxiv. 20.

As the difficulties connected with prayer which we have chiefly been considering, seemed to admit of a sufficient answer upon the principle on which they offered themselves, I have hitherto left it untouched. I desire, however, to say a word or two at parting upon it. We may look at it without engaging again in any of the details that have occupied us so long; and it seems important to do something to fix our notions upon it, before we leave it—not merely because as we have seen, it is liable to be misapplied very grossly, but because it has been often misunderstood by its opponents and in consequence denounced in too indiscriminating a way to be likely to produce any useful effects upon those who have misapplied it.

The principle is that as we have in the visible world a real disclosure of the nature and the

purposes of the Being from whom Revelation professes to come, and as it is impossible that He can contradict Himself, so, however Revelation may be listened to while it only professes to enlarge the knowledge of Him which observation and reason give, it cannot be allowed to contradict this testimony, and is greatly discredited when it does. And the principle seems so much akin to that upon which Revelation is founded, and the mode of applying it seems so similar, that it does not surprise one, that it should be so entirely relied on as it is—and it must be conceded that the principle is an undoubted one.

The fundamental principle indeed that the book of Nature and the book of Revelation are by the same author and that they may therefore be expected to correspond, is a part of the foundation of Butler's illustrious defence of Revelation. And his inference is not more undoubted than theirs. His, as you doubtless remember, is that difficulties in Revelation or objections against it cannot be relied upon as proving that it has not come from God, if similar difficulties can be shown in the constitution of the world and the course of His providence—which is not only undoubtedly true, but, as often appears in his investigation of particular instances, the correspondence may be such as to go beyond repelling the objection and may offer a positive argument in support of the common origin of the two schemes. But however undoubted the inference in the abstract

is, it is not more unquestionable than that of the objectors: that if what God says of Himself in nature be contradicted by anything which is asserted of Him in Revelation, it is a proof that Revelation or this part of it at least has not God for its Author.

Both principles looked at in the general enunciation of them are equally unquestionable—the only difference that would appear in that way of viewing them is that the one seems to threaten to overthrow the divine authority of Revelation much more directly and decisively than the other can be made to support it. But when we come to the mode of applying them, we see that the advantage must all lie on the other side.

For Butler's argument engages us most with the parts of Nature's course which present obscurities, difficulties, and objections—whereas the objections, upon this principle, should be drawn from what we thoroughly understand. Nor is it here that in general this weakness will be found, as indeed might be expected—for what we call experience even when it seems simplest is such a mixture of observation and influence that a very slight analysis serves to show that there is the very highest degree of uncertainty in what we think we have learned in a way that precludes all uncertainty, as in the case which we have been so long considering to make out an inconsistency between the Scripture promises to prayer and the constitution and laws of the world in which we live, it would be necessary

that we should know with certainty that Prayer could only be answered, as it is promised it shall, by violating or suspending these laws. And then we should know that we have an evidence that it was God's pleasure that they should be preserved inviolate. But how do we know this? not by experience—for experience that they have been uniformly preserved supposing that we had such experience would only warrant us in inferring that they would be kept so under the same circumstances always, but then we cannot persuade ourselves that we know the circumstances which ought to affect the Divine mind so fully as to say they are unchanged. The fact seems to be that all reasonings for the uniformity of Nature's course, seem to be in forgetfulness that Nature has an intelligent Author, and Sustainer, and Ruler. And that her course is only another name for His mode of acting. If we believe that all things owe their power of acting upon our minds, and upon each other, altogether to the power of God, it does not seem of much consequence although it has been made of a great deal, whether we think that every part of the course of Nature at every moment is the result of a distinct exertion of Divine power; or believe this power to have been exerted once for all, in forming at the first various existences, and endowing them with various properties, whereby they are capable of bringing about all the appearances of the Universe.

Which relation we believe Creation bears to the

Creator seems of very little importance except to our imaginations. For when we remember that the Divine foresight pervades all time and reaches to the very remotest results of the properties which He has bestowed upon His creatures, we must see that the latter hypothesis maintains not only as real but as close and entire a dependence of every event upon the will of God as the former, and that it is only from transferring, as we are so given to do, some of our own multiplied imperfections to the Most High, that we imagine there is a difference between them. But these are the only legitimate notions which are to be annexed to the phrase "A Course of Nature." If we mean by it a series of causes and effects independent of God, we are virtually denying His sovereignty of the world. But then, when once we understand to look upon the whole as effects of Divine Agency, we must feel that we know infinitely too little of all the causes which should influence the Divine mind, to be able to pronounce that He will without any deviation or change continue to act as He has hitherto acted—of course any engagement which He has made to do so, will be inviolably kept; but when we consider what are the grounds upon which we regard Him as having made such an engagement we shall find them insufficient for all that is made to rest on them.

The most forcible reason doubtless is that He has made us so instinctively to expect the permanence of the properties which we discover in

matter, and to act and to reason upon the supposition of their permanence. And certainly this does seem when we look back upon it, a rational ground of belief that their uniformity will be preserved for all the purposes, both of acting and reasoning, but nothing beyond. Neither, however, requires absolute inviolability—and it may fairly be questioned whether we have any reasonable ground to expect more. But whichever notion we adopt concerning it, it is plainly a ground of expectation and belief. It is to a certain extent and in some way a disclosure of God's nature and of His purposes; and as He cannot contradict Himself, it would be an intelligible ground for questioning Revelation, or if the case admitted it, doubting the correctness of our interpretation of it, if we found it to contradict any clear declaration or engagement which God makes by this other mode of communication with us. To those who would not venture to question Revelation upon such grounds, the apprehension of any such opposition creates a difficulty which it seems desirable to remove. This is what is at times apprehended concerning the Scripture promises to prayer. And I have been for some time employed in showing you that the apprehension is groundless —that there is nothing which experience makes known to us with certainty of the constitution of the world and of the laws by which it is governed which is inconsistent with the testimony of Scripture to the efficacy of Prayer. I trust I succeeded

in removing the difficulty, and that even when the reply engaged us most with second causes, I said enough to guard you against any misconceptions of the object of resorting to them in the case. That it was not to interpose them between us and the First Cause in this act of Communion with Him, but to make it more direct, and close, and free, by showing that all the doubts, which such objections cast upon the invitations, the exhortations, and the promises, by which we are encouraged so to approach Him, are groundless: and that we may surrender ourselves to them without hesitation or reserve.

But supposing all that we have said acquiesced in, a serious difficulty remains, upon which I should wish to say a little more than I was able to say when I touched upon it before. All that we have said, only shows that we are wrong in supposing, that God's fixed arrangements for the Government of the world, as they are made known to us by observation, forbid the expectation of an answer to our prayers.

But then can we expect an answer consistently with any just views of His own nature? It is proved that He has left Himself the power to give such an answer if He pleases, but is it reasonable to suppose that He has the will—what notions of Deity, what notions beyond the very rudest encourage us to expect that prayer can produce any effect upon His feelings towards us, or upon His dealings with us? Do we address Him as ignorant

of our wants, as unwilling to do all that is right to relieve them; or as capable of being wrought upon, by our importunity to do what is wrong? The most benevolent of our fellow-men may need such information from us. Even when they do not want it, or after they have received it, their sense of what is right may be too feeble to move them, unless compassion be brought to its aid and they may even be wrought on by importunity to give us what both justice and pity fail to procure for us. But then has not this whole process a manifest reference to the frailty and imperfection of our own nature? And is it not a transfer to God of our own imperfections, both intellectua and moral, to hope that we shall move Him by supplications as we move each other? To be perfect, God must be impassive, raised above all these emotions which we excite in each other—He is no more likely to feel pity, than to learn something from what we say which was before unknown to Him, or to feel weariness at our complaints and to desire to relieve Himself from it by granting our petitions. Will He not do the best for all who are silent? Will He do more for those that pray?

To this it has been often answered as you know that it proceeds upon an imperfect view of the case, that it presumes that we are the same when we are silent and when we pray, that prayer, that is, is neither a sign, nor a cause of a change in us, while it really is both.

When we remember the invitations to prayer that Scripture offers, and the motives to yield to them which our condition supplies, we shall see that we cannot refuse to pray without being insensible to our guilt, or thinking that God is insensible to it—either that He will not punish or that He will not pardon it—We must be ignorant of our ignorance and our wants—or disbelieve His assurances that He is ready to help our weakness and to supply all our need. That is, we must be proud, blind, careless, disbelieving, distrustful—must we not be changed before we can pray, and are we not likely to undergo a further change while we pray? We must believe and feel all concerning God and ourselves, which we before disbelieved and disregarded—we must have laid aside our self-righteousness, our self-dependence, our unbelief, our distrust, before we can come to God as guilty, and needy, and helpless sinners, before we can come to Him as a Hearer of prayer, and cast all our care upon Him that careth for us. Prayer, including under the name, confession and thanksgiving, and praise, as well as supplication, and deprecation—can only be offered by a humble, contrite, confiding heart, with the self-recollection which a preparation for the duty requires, the self-abasement to which it leads, the exercise of anxieties about hidden things about the future, about spiritual things, to which our carnal and worldly hearts are naturally most dead. It brings us into direct communion with Him who is of purer eyes

than to behold iniquity, and forces us therefore to recall all the miracles of mercy, by which a way has been made for sinners like ourselves, to approach Him and all the special mercies which we have ourselves received—so that while it proves a change because it cannot really be offered without one, it seems to provide for such an exercise of all the graces which it requires of humility and repentance, and faith, and love, as must ever upon the natural principles of our constitution produce further change in us. And if it be thus, the occasion and the cause of a change in us, it is plain that there is no ground for treating the representation that it procures a change in God's dealings with us, as if it arraigned the unchangeableness of the Most High, or indeed as if it were opposed in any way to any of His infinite perfections. God's unchangeableness at the most could only warrant us in expecting that He will act in the same way while the circumstances are the same; I say at the most, because in God's dealings with His moral creatures, the fact that the circumstances remain the same in our apprehension of them, may be a reason with Him for a change in His mode of treating us, as we find in the earliest records of His judgments, that the iniquity of man's nature was the reason of His visiting the earth with a flood, and the reason of His determining not again to inflict such a calamity upon it. (Gen. vi.) "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every

imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually, and it repented the Lord that He had made man upon the earth. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, and the creeping things, and the fowls of the air, for it repenteth Me that I have made them." And again in chapter viii, when this awful judgment was over, "The Lord said in His heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth, neither will I again smite any more, everything as I have done." And doubtless that we have not been changed by one course of dealings may be a reason intelligible in the parallel course of discipline under which we live, for employing another, which it would not have been fit to employ until the former had been used, without producing any effect. But at all events no one will be disposed to regard such a change of conduct towards us as Prayer is said to effect, unsuitable to His immutability in any right understanding of the word. If such be really the effects of Prayer upon us, it would not seem that we ought to wonder at the effects which it is said to produce upon Him. It cannot be alleged that He is changeable, if what He withholds until we are changed He bestows when we are. All this has been often and long ago said, it is what is always said in reply to this objection to the efficacy of Prayer. It is so true, and so obvious that it was probably nearly coeval with

the objection. And I only recal it to your minds now to supply some cautions concerning the true use of it. I do not mean to object to it or to improve upon it. I believe that it is the best answer that Reason has to give in the case, and I believe that it is not only true but useful. It is most true doubtless that all God's gifts and graces are proportioned to our moral state, and that prayer is an instrument by which a salutary change in us is effected, and confirmed and advanced; and it is most useful as bringing before us most distinctly, upon grounds very easily understood, the importance of so addressing ourselves to the exercise, and so conducting it that we may experience these happy influences.

But then it is but a partial answer to the difficulties, and it may be dangerous,—It only accounts for a part of what is to be accounted for, and given without qualification or additions, it might fall in with and confirm erroneous views of the Divine Nature, on which the objection rests, and it might contribute to the forgetfulness of our true relation to God in which it is itself conceived.

It is evidently partial, because it gives no account of the efficacy of intercessory prayer. It may be a sufficient account of the success of prayer which has for its object to procure good for ourselves or to avert evil, that as we prepare for prayer and offer it, we are ourselves so changed that it becomes safe to give us our

desires, and to remove our crosses, to turn aside our fears.

But how does it justify the expectation under which we ask God for blessings either temporal or spiritual for those that we love? It cannot be said that it produces any wholesome moral effects upon those on whose behalf it is offered in the way in which it does upon ourselves, and it is no answer to this to say that it produces such effects upon them in another way—that it procures for them such spiritual influences as effect the needful change in them—the change that would make them fit for such blessings and mercies as we ask for on their behalf. It is true no doubt that it does procure such spiritual influences—but how? This objection derived from the wisdom and goodness of God is as much directed against such an effort of prayer as against the supposition that it procures temporal good or averts evil directly.—According to the notions of God's perfection on which it rests, it is as inconceivable with them *at least* to suppose that He is moved by our prayer to bestow spiritual good which He withheld until it was offered, as that He gives any earthly good in answer to it—so that this reply would put off the difficulty but one step and give us no help in the next in which we certainly want help to the full as much. Neither would it I suppose be accepted as a solution of the difficulty, that no good is bestowed in answer to such prayer except such as there would be no obstacle to bestowing on the individual for whom we ask it,

from anything in his own moral state, but which was withheld on account of ours, and is at length given when we pray, as good is given to ourselves. This would be accounting on this principle indeed for the success of intercessory prayer to a certain extent, but by no means to the extent to which we are exhorted and encouraged to offer it in the Bible. We might take it as an account of the success of such a prayer as Paul directs the Church at Rome to offer on his behalf. "Now I beseech you brethren for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the Saints, that I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed." We might account for the success of this prayer, at least for the part of it which was answered, which was the very part in which those who offered it were concerned. We may suppose that when they prayed to have Paul brought safely to them the only difficulty in bestowing this blessing upon them was taken away, though when they went beyond this object and prayed for a mode in which this was to be effected by delivering him from the unbelieving Jews (a part in which their prayers could not upon the same principles exert any influence) then God saw fit to withhold their prayers, and gave him to them in fact in the very opposite way to which he and they desired that he should

be given. We may render an account of such a prayer as that which is offered on behalf of others, but in which we ourselves have an intelligible concern. But how insufficiently does it account for other instances, when for example the Apostle at Rome gives directions to the Ephesian Church to offer prayers for all Saints, especially for him and for the success of his preaching at Rome. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all Saints. And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the Gospel. For which I am an Ambassador in bonds: that I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." How upon such principles are we to account for the wide range or the special objects here provided for by intercessory prayer? How for the large command and express promise in St. John "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death."

It is evidently but to a very limited range of intercessory prayer that such a solution applies—a range within which we have no warrant in Holy Scripture to confine it—for it evidently was intended to extend to every member of Christ's Church, and to go even beyond them, and embrace the whole creation of God, and that when we offered special prayers for individuals, there was no blessing spiritual or temporal which we ask for

ourselves, that we might not also ask for them. Whereas this solution applies only to the class of cases in which the good that we ask for others is in such a sense a good to ourselves, that it ought not upon the general principles of the Divine government, to be bestowed without some consideration of us and our moral state, and only to the cases of this class, in which when we pray, all others concerned in the blessing are in a meet state to have it bestowed, and in which no obstacle to conferring it remains, excepting on our part.

We are helped therefore but a very little way upon such principles, and are cast back again upon the Scripture promises to prayer, and the Scripture character of God, as a hearer and answerer of prayer.

This is our objection to the solution which must decidedly forbid our receiving it as a perfect one—and it is well; for it gives an imperfect view of God, whom His own word represents as compassionate and merciful, as well as bounteous and just, and it leaves out of view too, what we never ought to forget in the case, His revelation to us as a reconciled Father in Christ Jesus our Lord, as not having spared Him but as having delivered Him up for us all, and therefore ready with Him also, freely to give us all things.

We certainly offer God, in a very different light from that in which Scripture everywhere presents Him to us, when we exclude from our representa-

tions of Him all the amiable affections, and regard Him as a being no less raised above what is good, than what is evil in ourselves. We must speak cautiously when we speak of the Most High, and must of course exclude from Him all that arises in us from imperfections of our finite nature, and all that in any way would charge Him with perturbation or passions, all that is uneasy or perturbed in human passion. But we cannot be wrong in regarding pain and suffering as opposed to His nature as vice is; and Him as one who delights in the happiness of His creatures, as He does in their obedience.

It is very true that all God's gracious dealings with us are wisely accommodated to our moral state at every moment; that He gives, and withholds, and takes away with a wise consideration of our wants. But though this is true, how different is the impression of His nature, and springs of action which such a statement makes from that which His own representation of Himself in His Word is fitted to produce upon us, in which, though wisdom and righteousness are always seen as supplying a rule and limits to the exercise of His beneficence, its source and spring are described to lie in what is more attractive and tender. As when He proclaims Himself to Moses as the Lord God merciful and gracious, long suffering and abundant in mercy and in truth keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty. And when

again and again He is described and addressed under the same character by those to whom He most fully made Himself known, He is described as retaining not His anger, because He delighteth in mercy, as Nehemiah ix. 17, "But thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness. For thou Lord art good and ready to forgive and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee. The Lord is gracious, full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great mercy—The Lord is good to all and his tender mercies are over all His works." And in numberless other passages of the same kind, where the hopes and the prayers and the thanksgivings of His people all exhibit the same character—as in Lam iii. 22—31. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not, they are new every morning. For the Lord will not cast off for ever, but though he cause grief yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies, for he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." "Return oh Lord! save me for thy mercy's sake." Ps. vi. 4. "Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of thy mercy." Num. xiv. 19. "Nevertheless for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them, for thou art a gracious and merciful God." Neh. ix. 31.

These are but a specimen as you know of the passages in which this character of God is acknow-

ledged as the ground of His servants' hopes before Him, in which it is distinctly described as the spring of His gracious answer to their prayers. And is not the whole tendency of such passages to lead us to regard God as not merely administering justice, or preserving order, or distributing bounty — but sparing, forgiving, relieving, blessing—from the very principles from which we know such gracious acts naturally spring—clemency and compassion and loving kindness and tender mercy because He is plenteous in mercy, because He delighteth in mercy, because His compassions fail not they are new every morning. From the character which makes shewing mercy, assuaging pain, relieving want, giving comfort to the afflicted; accordant with His nature; and afflicting and punishing alien from it—according to which acts of grace are referred to their appropriate source; vengeance is described as His strange work and His strange act, and He is described to us in our own language as not afflicting from His heart, or grieving the children of men; as moved by their afflictions, by their cries, by their supplications: moved to pity, to forgive, and to deliver, them.

But though I should be sorry to say that our natural relation to God does not allow of our addressing Him in prayer, and supply motives to it too, and though Scripture contains I think some very clear examples of prayer having been heard and answered, though offered by those who were not brought into a new relation to Him by faith—

yet as all the invitations and exhortations to pray and all the promises to prayer in Scripture are addressed to those who stand in this new relation to God, who are no more enemies but reconciled, no more strangers or foreigners, but of the household of God; no more servants, but sons—children of God, heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; and as doubtless the most important view that can be taken of prayer is as it is the appropriate instrument of communion of God's children with their Father Which is in heaven, under this new relation to Him—any mode of accounting for its efficacy which leaves out all that is peculiar to our altered position, must be, at the very least, a very inadequate one. If it be too much to say that the parental relation was instituted to be a standing type and memorial of the relation to God, which His redeemed family bear, and an instrument in training them in the feelings which become it, it is at least certain that it is as much referred to as actually representing that higher relation, and indeed resorted to to convey to us, and impress on us, all that is most important to be known and felt by us as children of God, as if its chief end was to supply us with such information and impressions. It is used to assure us of our future prospects, to make us feel our present privileges, to teach us our duties —the obedience, the reverence, the fear, and the love which we owe to God—and above all to enlarge our apprehensions and exalt our sense of His love to us—that love which passeth knowledge — to

confirm our confidence in it by presenting it to us as paternal—and so sending us to our own hearts for an image and shadow of it, and to our memory to supply us with affecting evidences how wakeful, how tender, how alive to all our troubles and cares and sorrows and pains, how moved by our petitions, how prompt to answer them. Can we doubt that in representing Him as a Father, and in representing His love as parental love, it was intended to send parents and children into their own hearts and memories for the love that they have experienced, and that all might have a sense of the warmth and tenderness of His love—of the alacrity with which it will answer every call and supply every want? Could we doubt, I say, what the purpose of such representation of it was even if it were not directly so used? But the Lord does so use it as to leave no question that it was intended to give confidence to our prayers. He reminds us of the effect of parental love even upon our own corrupt and hard selfish hearts; and he desires us to exalt all these effects, that we may find an image and shadow of the love of our Heavenly Father, and pray to Him with the confidence with which we ought. "If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give His holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" And the Apostle carries the appeal still higher by reminding us that this love did not withhold from us His only begotten Son; and asks, can they who have received such a proof of His love, can they

doubt that He is willing to give us everything that we ask for—"He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

No one doubts that there is in all such language an accommodation to our habits of thought, to our modes of apprehension, and to our limited faculties and to all the imperfections of our minds. It is not that we have no language to express, we have no thoughts to conceive adequately the nature or the attributes of God, and must therefore be content with imperfect representations of them. But then, is it not safer to acquiesce in those imperfect representations of Himself which His wisdom has provided for us in His word; to rest in them, and make them the foundations of all our feelings towards Him, and especially in this act of supplication to Him, than when we employ those in their stead which our own reason is able to supply us? How hazardous such a substitution must be in such a case, it requires but little consideration to see. Advance such representations of the Divine nature as we may, they still remain imperfect; and is it not likely that the safer stage has been chosen by God to stop at, than we shall arrive at by going further? Is there not an evident risk, supposing that we could be perfectly sure that we preserved the truth, that we were destroying the proportion—that we have not advanced all parts in the same degree, and that so our reasonings would not be checked and corrected as they are, when they are founded upon

those better adjusted representations which God has supplied? We may in the new stage to which we have brought our conceptions require some knowledge of other attributes which we have no means of procuring for ourselves. And there are other hazards which might be assigned. This however is not what we are doing. We are not inventing, but interpreting, not giving any representations of God of our own devisings, but seeking to ascertain the true sense of those which His own word contains.

But then we are told that we must remember that the same word speaks of His hands and of His feet, of His eyes and of His ears, that it ascribes to Him some human passions and affections which bear too manifestly the stamp of imperfection to allow of our ascribing them to Him, as repentance, grief, anger, and revenge; that we judge in all such cases that it was not intended to convey to us anything as it is in Him, but merely in its relation to ourselves and to other parts of His creation; nothing as it is in its nature, but only in its effects. We need no safe-guard in such cases to protect us from misunderstanding what is intended to be communicated to us—when what are perfections in our own mind, are ascribed to Him in the Bible, as wisdom, justice, holiness, and the better affections of our nature. But we are apt to be insensible to the absurdity of taking what is said as if any of these were more properly and literally in God after the manner that they are in us, while in fact they are only

just the same kind of analogies and resemblances—and "those things which we call by these names when attributed to God" are of so different a nature from what they are in us, and so superior to all that we can conceive, that in reality there is no more likeness between them, than between our hand and God's power.—"Nor can we draw consequences from the real nature of one to that of the other, with more justness of reason than we conclude, because our hand consists of fingers and joints, that the power of God is distinguished by such parts." "We ought therefore," it is said, to interpret all these things when attributed to God as thus expressed only by way of condescension to our capacities in order to help us to conceive what we are to expect from Him, and what duty we are to pay Him." "They are ascribed to Him only by way of analogy and comparison. . . . . are quite of another nature" [from what in ourselves is called by the same name] and "we have no proper notion of them any more than a man born blind has of light and colours;" and therefore "we ought no more to pretend to determine what is consistent or inconsistent with them, than a blind man ought to determine from what he hears or feels to what objects the sense of seeing reaches." And it is asked, "If such knowledge of natural things as only shows the effects they have on us be sufficient to all the uses of life, though we do not know what they are in themselves, why should not the like representations of God

and His attributes be sufficient for the ends of religion though we be ignorant of His and their nature?"[1]

I have taken these quotations from a well known discourse of Archbishop King, which was intended to show that there was no reason to infer that the divine foreknowledge of our actions is inconsistent with human freedom, because human foreknowledge would be—for that they are entirely different in nature, and therefore it is not reasonable to argue that they are alike in their effects. The parts in the passages therefore which refer to the moral attributes of God are only incidental to the main purpose of the discourse and illustrative of His general position and confirmatory of it. It is with these only however that I am concerned. The whole discourse is a striking exhibition of the deceptive acuteness for which the writer was remarkable—but I leave it to the answers which it has received; and only notice it, because it is the most celebrated attempt, with which I am acquainted, to give some kind of stability to those views of the divine nature upon which this objection which we have been treating is founded; and which the answer that we have given is too much calculated to fall in with and confirm.

1. It has been argued against this view, that it renders vain and unintelligible the precepts with which the Scripture abounds, which propose the divine

[1] Sermon preached at Christ Church, Dublin, May 15, 1709, by Archbishop King, on "Divine Predestination and Foreknowledge consistent with the Freedom of Man's Will." 5th Edition.

perfections as objects of *imitation*. For if these moral attributes be so different as Dr. King describes them—that there is really no more resemblance between the principles in the Divine and human mind which are called by the same name, than between divine power and the human hand, it would seem that we have no notion which could guide us in our imitation, and nothing indeed which could be brought to any likeness however distant.—This has been pressed against the view as I think most justly, and has only been answered on what I regard as unsound principles, and even upon these by suppressing what King has really said, or explaining away its proper force.

2. It might have been urged with equal force at least that the mode in which we are reasoned with in the Bible concerning the Divine attributes is wholly inconsistent with the belief "that we have no proper notion of them, any more than a man born blind has of light and colours. And therefore that we ought no more to pretend to determine what is consistent with them, than a blind man ought to determine from what he hears or feels to what objects the sense of seeing reaches." Let any one with this position in his mind read any of the many passages in the Holy Scriptures in which we are reasoned with about the Divine conduct and its suitableness to the Divine character; and he will need no help to satisfy him that the Bible is written upon a very different belief of our apprehensions of God's attributes.

3. But the most conclusive evidence of the unsoundness of this view, may be drawn from its effects, in defeating the direct purpose of a large part of the word of God. It is acknowledged by the author that all this analogical knowledge to which he says we are absolutely limited in the case, leaves us in ignorance of the nature of God and His attributes. But he maintains that in acquainting us with their effects, it does enough for all the ends of religion. I need not go through his very defective summary of the detailed proof that he gives of the sufficiency of the knowledge to which he supposes us confined, to secure all the ends of religion which he enumerates. Because it might be more briefly and decisively tested by inquiring what can it do to establish the very highest end of religion—the establishment of the love of God in the heart. A man must have a very strange notion of his own nature, if he thinks that provided there be the same amount of bounty bestowed upon us, or of mercy extended towards us, the same feelings will be produced in our minds, whatever be its source, that if only the same benefit be received by us, the effects upon our minds and heart will be the same, whether it be scorn or clemency, prodigality or kindness which has procured it for us. Every one knows that the feelings of gratitude and love with which our benefactors are regarded bear no necessary proportion to the extent of the services rendered to us: every one knows that there is no amount of careless bounty which could excite much gratitude or any

love, and that the benefits which we receive are only effectual in moving either as they are proofs of concern about us, interest in our well being, affection for us. And that in the very degree in which these feelings are evidenced towards us, and not in the degree in which we are served, do we feel grateful and affectionate in return.

There might have been some who were looking on at the scene in the Treasury with Christ who would have passed over the widow's contribution without any notice and have glowed with admiration at some of the larger contributors; but when the Lord testified that while the latter gave of their abundance, not only were the two mites of the former given out of her penury, but that they were all that she had, even all her living, I suppose that there were few that heard Him, who did not alter their estimate of the respective contributions; and agree with Him that that poor woman had given more than they all. And the Bible meets this feeling of the human mind when it offers to us all the mercy and the blessings which we have received from God not merely in their intimate connection with our eternal well being, but under the circumstances which make them the most decisive evidences of His love. We find indeed in addressing His people all His bounties and mercies referred distinctly to the source, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee [have I extended loving kindness unto thee.]" But from the time that the mysteries of redemption

were fully made known they are resorted to almost exclusively as if all other proofs of the divine love were lost in them. We are told that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"—that "God commendeth His love toward us in that when we were yet sinners Christ died for us"—that "in this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him"—"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."—The privileges to which believers are exalted through this gift are pointed to us as intelligible present evidences of this love, which must be felt by all who are partakers of them. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." And all His children are described as receiving this proof and making the conviction of this *love* the source and spring of all their love. "We love Him, because He first loved us." And as trusting in the unchangeableness of this love—"persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth nor any other creature can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This is the way in which we are dealt with by Him who made us. It is not for God as the unknown and incomprehensible source of all that we

enjoy and all that we hope for—while we are left in ignorance of the principle from which His bounty flows—that our love is demanded. It is for Him who is Love, and who has given us proofs so affecting and resistless of the great and exceeding love wherewith He loved us.

Doubtless the love of God, boundless, everlasting, unchangeable, infinitely transcending our highest imaginings, exalted infinitely as it is above the ebbs and flows, the impatience, and waywardness and inconstancy of human affections—cannot in its length and breadth and height and depth, be comprehended by any finite capacity or represented adequately by the feelings of any finite existence.

But this is consistent with our having true, though most inadequate, notions—and is widely different from saying that of its nature we know and can know nothing; that no affection which we ourselves feel can give us any more apprehension of it, than we have of the objects of a new sense—and that so it is the name only of certain effects which we experience, a hope for which therefore stands for the same thing with all who agree in their apprehension of the effects, or in their belief that they know nothing of the cause. We may appeal to the passages just referred to, for conclusive evidence that this is not what is meant in the Bible by the love of God, and to the heart of every one for a proof that if it were, the demand made there on our love in return would be one which we are so formed as not to be capable of answering;

that we are not so framed as to be affected in the same way by the same blessings from whatever source they come to us, whether from iron destiny or from blind chance, or from careless bounty, or from parental love.

We may say the same of the other parts of the representations of God's nature, which are given us in His word. Parts of them are plainly figurative and cannot be mistaken as literal; for the figures are taken from objects of sense, and are used in the same way to express faculties and operations of our own minds. God's spiritual nature therefore, to say nothing of His infinity, is a sufficient safeguard against misconception. And our own use of the same language in application to our own spirits is a sufficient guide as to understanding it rightly, as expressing either operations or their effects, or the power which is their source. There are emotions and affections ascribed to Him, however, which we experience in our own minds which might be found in much more exalted natures, but which cannot simply and literally be supposed to belong to Him—but which I am sure are not received according to their design when they are taken merely as conveying to us certain acts which He performs or effects which we are to hope or fear, without intimating anything of the principles which are their source. I am sure that these were in most cases in which such language is used intended to be conveyed to us. And that they are to be found by abstracting from the emotions as expe-

rienced by ourselves all uneasiness and perturbation, and mutability, and everything they owe to our corruption and imperfection. And that so we shall be conducted to that which in our own minds is the shadow and image of that in the Divine mind which was intended to be conveyed to us. That thus anger and revenge as applied to God would conduct us to that hatred of sin which is its source, and which seems as essential a part of the divine nature, as love of holiness, compassion and pity to the benevolence of the Most High; and to that complacency in the contemplation of happiness which seems to infer that pain and suffering are things displeasing in themselves and for themselves, but employed to restrain or to banish what is still more abhorrent to the Holy nature of God. Love and hatred as more abiding affections offer less occasion for the same process. And when directed to their legitimate objects and purified in conception from all the intermixture of unruly passions and carnal desires and evil tempers which disturb and debase them may be taken as parts of that image of God in which man was created, and as offering to us still the means of obtaining a true though most imperfect apprehension of a part of His nature in which we are most deeply interested.

This is as far as we can safely go. Doubtless it was intended upon these as upon all the representations offered to us in the word of God, that we should use under the guidance of reason all means within our reach of arriving at the true sense of the

language employed. But in general these aids are from some nearer source than from refined or deep speculations, and lead to no violent or wide departure from the common sense of language. And when the nature of God is concerned, we must feel how peculiarly hazardous it must be to make such changes as shall leave it in any way doubtful whether we are employing His own representations of Himself, or a human substitution for them.

It may not be easy to apply a strict limit to the changes that we shall make—but we may be at least sure that we have gone beyond the true limits when we make such changes in the more obvious sense of such representations as impair or destroy their power of raising the affections which they were manifestly intended to raise in us. If our own reason or the general testimony of Scripture, or the testimony of particular passages supply no means of establishing that our improvements have gone to unwarrantable lengths; and even though philosophy may seem to countenance or to demand them—still if in their altered form they counteract or impede the purposes for which they were given, it needs no reasoning to prove that we have grievously misinterpreted His word, and that we shall do wisely to return to its more obvious and simple sense. I have no time for a detailed application of this to the case in hand. But after what I have before said, I should trust much cannot be needed to make it clear. Without examining what may be said in support of such an interpretation of

the language of Scripture concerning the moral attributes and affections of God as we have been considering, it is plain that it does not abide this fair and decisive test;—that so interpreted, it does not furnish the foundation for the affections which it is used in the Holy Scripture to raise, or supply the means of raising which it is evidently there understood to supply. And that in a simple and more literal way of interpreting it, it does.—And that guiding ourselves by the rule of not departing from the more literal sense when the deviation interferes with the purpose for which the representations of God's nature were employed, we are able to make all the alterations which the common use of language—Scriptural views of God—and right reason seem absolutely to require.

This is enough for my purpose.—For my purpose was, as I need hardly remind you, not to discover new motives to engage you in the duty of Prayer, and to sustain you in it,—not even to add strength to those which Revelation has provided, but to remove some doubts and difficulties and objections which interfere with the free action of such motives upon the mind, and so to leave you to their undisturbed operation.

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